

**MY STORY: AN ADVENTURE IN HEARING AND TELLING**

**A Christian Education Curriculum for Young Adults**

**A Professional Project**

**presented to**

**the Faculty of the**

**School of Theology at Claremont**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Doctor of Ministry**

**by**

**Robert James Burns Jr.**

**May, 1995**

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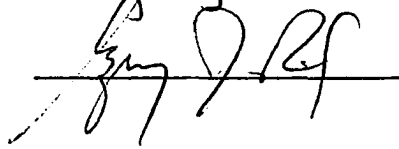
Robert James Burns Jr.,

*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty  
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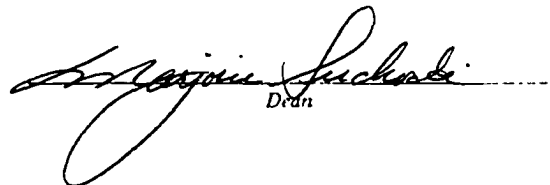
**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

*Faculty Committee*

Mary Elizabeth Mullins Moore



May 1, 1995  
Date

  
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## Abstract

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by

Robert James Burns Jr.

Young adults have, for the most part, been absent from most mainline Protestant churches for the last three decades. This absence stems in part from emphasis on church growth directed at families with young children, and in part from a lack of recognition on the part of local churches that young adults have changed from one generation to the next. There is a growing awareness of the unique characteristics of the thirteenth generation which comprise most of today's young adult population, although almost no curriculum resources have been designed for use with these unchurched young adults.

Storytelling is emerging in general education as well as religious education as an instructional method. Biblical storytelling is an effective way to communicate tradition as well as address the specific needs of young adults such as need for community, feelings of isolation, and an understanding of self-worth and value. Ministry to young adults in the thirteenth generation is not only mandated by the Great Commandment, but it also is a necessity if the Church is to transform into an organization that can remain viable in the twenty-first century.

This project develops a curriculum for unchurched young adults for use as an extension ministry of the local church. The focus is on persons born between 1961 and 1981 who have no connection with the Church. Characteristics of this unique generation are presented along with faith development models in order to design a curriculum that

will meet the needs and developmental stages of young adults. Biblical stories are chosen that address the issues that seem most often to surface in analysis of this young adult audience. Development of a storytelling theology is presented and biblical exegesis and exposition of the stories used in the curriculum is provided as a study guide. Suggestions for implementing the use of the curriculum, in order to reach young adults outside the church, are provided in the concluding chapter.

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This project is dedicated to my wife,

**Paulette Marie Faust Burns**

and my children,

**Benjamin Paul and Rebecca Marie**

who have given up a lot of time and energy with dad  
in order that I might finish this work.

And in loving memory of

**Jonathan Robert Burns**

November 8, 1977 - December 21, 1991

who was the one who most wanted to see things completed.



## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### Problem

This project deals with the problem of limited Christian education curriculum resources designed specifically for unchurched young adults.

#### Importance

This project evolves out of a need within the local church for curriculum resources that are designed for young adults, and are especially sensitive to the needs and interests of the unchurched young adult. When the field of curriculum available for young adults is surveyed, very few resources are found. Those which do exist presuppose a setting within a church program and young adults who are continuing, not beginning, Christian education. While adult Christian education resources are plentiful, they are designed primarily for adults who have an established history in the Church, and they do not address the unique concerns of young adults who have not yet entered into the life of the Church. A remarkable lack exists in recent religious education resources written expressly for this audience.

The young adult today, while sharing experiences common in our society, is a unique type of person. The word I have adopted as most illustrative of their situation is *disconnected*. Young adults in American society today, named by others *Generation -*

*X<sup>1</sup>* and *13th Generation*,<sup>2</sup> are the first generation who cannot expect to experience a better, more successful and more prosperous life than their parents. Previous generations were raised with the belief that in a society such as ours, hard work, education and determination would result in material success. The generation who came of age during World War II added home ownership to the widespread material success expectation of the growing middle class society in this nation. The arrival of credit purchases, for homes and other major purchases, followed by consumer purchases on credit cards, further increased the expectations of material success. The largely middle class society in the United States today has, for example, little thought of saving for major purchases. The persistent attitude is that if you want it, or need it, why wait? Monthly payments are available. Preceding generations believed that more and better education would result in better jobs, more employment opportunity, and enhanced status in the community. These commonly accepted values in American society have been all but destroyed for the young adult of today. Better education, better jobs and more income opportunities are passing from the hands of the young. In fact, many young adults are so disillusioned with the prospects the society has prepared for them that they are without hope for the current order, and they seek to disconnect from the institutions, such as the church, that have served their parents' generation. No longer does advanced education ensure a career position, nor does a high school education guarantee a living. The prevailing attitude

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Coupland, Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991)

<sup>2</sup> William Strauss and Neil Howe, Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069 (New York: William Morrow, 1991)

among young adults today is one of caution in which any idea coming from established institutions must be proven before it will be accepted or trusted. In earlier generations, ideas were accepted and appropriated into the belief system of our society because they came from the institutions such as government or the church which would never let us down.

The church has not, for the most part, caught on to the existence of the disconnected and is only beginning to wake up to the absence of young adults in church programs. At least since the mid 1960s, the established churches in their local programming expected that young people would leave the church during or shortly after high school, and return once again when they had families of their own and were ready to settle down. These were the years immediately following the boom in American Protestant churches and the euphoria of vast membership growth. Including large numbers of children in church programs may have overshadowed the needs of young adults. Some young adults today were children in those churches who grew up and out of the church when there was nothing for them. These are the ones who the church, by lack of attention, expected to leave as youth and return as young married couples. Except in rare instances today, most mainline churches still do not have any intentional ministry for young adults. Young adults involved in church programs are teaching children or youth, or are students in older adult classes because of kinship ties. Curiously, non-traditional churches with innovative settings and ministries are attracting this disconnected generation of young adults. These are the groups who establish special ministries to specific target groups and are willing to capitalize on their status as non-traditional churches. Non-

denominational, non-traditional unaffiliated churches are by definition not part of the established church. As such, disillusionment towards the established church is not a barrier for the young adult in these varied ministries. The need among young adults to fit in somewhere is strong, and the established churches must find ways to overcome the past and initiate ministry with this dynamic generation.

The greatest challenge we have in ministry with young adults is to help them regain a sense of connection with the rest of the society in which they live. Campus ministry programs, college and careers classes, and other time tested approaches to young adult ministry have served well to maintain relationship with young adults already in the church structure. Yet these programs tend to be limited in scope to those already involved, and if seen as outreach ministries, may even emphasize the differences between the disconnected young adult and the young adult already within the institutions of our society. This curriculum is designed to help young adults recognize the similarities in their personal story and the stories of the traditions and culture around them. Since these young adults must learn on their own terms, the project is designed to provide an educational experience in which young adults can be introduced to the faith tradition of the Christian church and other elements of a society which, even unintentionally, has ignored them.

This project is based on the concept that stories exist everywhere in the world in which we live. We use them to describe our world, our origins and our relationship with other people. Stories define the parameters for behavior in our culture and they are used to communicate mores and traditions. We use stories to point up the foibles in our world and to poke fun at ourselves. Stories are used to deal with pain and suffering that at times

overwhelms us as well as to explain the very ordinary occurrences in our lives. Stories are used to form answers to the larger questions such as: The meaning of life, the nature of history and our relationship with God.

Storytelling demands both teller and hearer. Listening to the stories in the world around us is as important as telling our own story. For in listening to the stories in the world around us, both those now forming, and those from tradition, we begin to refine our own story as well as experience ourselves as part of the larger whole. This project will introduce participants to the practice of storytelling and story listening. Becoming aware of storytelling traditions brings us to an awareness of other peoples, other ways of thinking and acting and, in short, brings us into the realm of community.

### Thesis

The thesis underlying this project is that young adults, particularly unchurched young adults, could be nourished and guided on their faith journeys with resources designed especially for them, especially narrative resources that encourage them to tell their stories and encounter the stories of the larger Jewish-Christian tradition.

The overarching purpose of this project is to create a curriculum resource that will help unchurched young adults to experience their own special religious perspective. The specific goal of the resource will be first to help the young adult identify his/her own stories and, then, to view and evaluate them in light of faith stories in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The project grows out of concern that young adults today are a unique

generation and if they are to be reached effectively, method and content appropriate to their concerns must be used.

The Church exists for two basic purposes: Salvation of the world, and in the meantime, unconditional service to the world. The Church is to lead individuals into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and to assist Christians in meeting basic material needs of their neighbors. The great commission (Matt. 28:18-20) compels those who would be disciples of Jesus Christ to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (NRSV). The Great Commandment recorded in Matthew 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34 and Luke 10:25-29 provides the basis for the commandments we should teach. The ethical dimension of loving neighbor as self provides the foundation statement demonstrated again and again in Jesus’ teaching of the life we are commanded to live in service to our neighbor. The unconditional nature of the commandment is represented in making disciples of “all the nations” (Matt. 28:19a) and in the recurring theme in Jesus’ teaching that neighbor is a universal term extending beyond cultural, religious, ethnic, or national boundaries.

The content of this project focuses on faith issues such as, who I am in relationship to God? (Discipleship) and ethical issues such as, how should I live out my faith? (Love for Neighbor). The content also includes the characteristics I identify in young adults: abandonment and commitment, affluence and self-worth and technology and interpersonal relationships. The particular issues addressed in the curriculum resource are: the nature of God, hope and reconciliation, covenant and community, unconditional love, affluence and worth, and service to others.

The Church has done a remarkable job throughout history communicating the Christian gospel in each age. There is nothing really new about the content in this young adult curriculum. The newness comes when we recognize that in each generation, the material must be presented in light of the issues of the times and the prior knowledge of the audience. The content of resource material is at its best when it is written to the concerns, experience and knowledge base of the intended audience. Material written 50 or 30 or even 10 years ago, while it may be perfectly usable, will not speak as clearly as material written today with current concerns in mind. By creating a curriculum that addresses the specific needs of this generation of young adults outside the Church, the tradition of Christian education as vital and relevant is maintained. I submit that preceding and succeeding generations have had, and will have, other unique issues that the Church has addressed and will address in the future.

The use of story also is valuable in meeting the needs of a young adult community. By discovering that our individual story is at the same time unique to us and common to others, we can begin to build relationships with other people and with God. The use of a narrative method invokes dialogue with the stories that we hear and with those who tell the stories. As a result, we can both communicate the content of faith and demonstrate what it means to become part of a faith community. By learning about the ethical commandments of the Christian faith we can identify what it means to live the Christian life. The curriculum moves from the telling of stories of all kinds into the identification of our own story set and into the presentation of the stories of the Christian tradition and

heritage. In a sense, method and content become intertwined at the point young adults are guided to both experience and live the stories of the Christian faith.

### Brief Survey of Literature

This project does not plow new ground, but builds on a significant amount of work already done in the area of story and its use in Christian education. The newer aspect of this project is to take storytelling to another audience, that of unchurched young adults. The resurgence of storytelling in general education at the elementary and secondary levels suggests that others have also identified that story is a corrective tool attempting to balance the abundance of technology available in education today. While access to information and our ability to process it has been a profound step forward in education, a balance is needed to maintain imagination in the educational process.

Thomas Groome and others have spent considerable time describing methods of using story telling within faith communities.<sup>3</sup> John Westerhoff and Charles R. Foster help to clarify the need to communicate the essential elements of our faith to the next generations.<sup>4</sup> Mary Elizabeth Moore provides a helpful construct for the way storytelling can be used in Christian education in her Traditioning Model.<sup>5</sup> In Teaching from the

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Groome, Christian Religious Education (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> See John H. Westerhoff, Will Our Children Have Faith? (New York: Seabury Press, 1976); and Charles R. Foster, Teaching in the Community of Faith (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Mary Elizabeth Moore, Education for Continuity and Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).



Heart, Moore gives careful attention to relational teaching which she describes as Narrative Method.<sup>6</sup> These images for Christian education are most appropriate for use with this generation of young adults. In the area of biblical interpretation and religious education, Mary C. Boys helps to clarify the kinds of issues essential for communicating faith tradition to new generations of faith adherents.<sup>7</sup> All of these individuals, however, and indeed virtually all of the Christian educators writing, have directed their attention primarily toward Christian education within a traditional church setting. Further, while significant curriculum development material has been written describing the process of creating resources for specific communities, we have not yet realized materials that can be placed in the hands of lay educators for application in the local church. We must take the foundations that have been described and apply them to persons not yet incorporated into the Church. David S. Steward addresses the problem unchurched persons and their needs, and the Church's response to them. He identifies some issues, such as listening to unchurched young adults, that we must appropriate into our curriculum.<sup>8</sup>

Sallie McFague provides some very helpful models for analyzing story and using story for religious reflection.<sup>9</sup> Specifically she describes the use of story in making

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Mary C. Boys, Biblical Interpretation in Religious Education (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> David S. Steward, "Why Do People Congregate?," in Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform, ed. C. Ellis Nelson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 70-88.

<sup>9</sup> Sallie McFague, Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

theological statements. John Dominic Crossan has provided significant insight into the area of analyzing story.<sup>10</sup> His diagrams of parable and definitions of the constituent parts of a parable are helpful in doing critical thinking about the parts of stories.

From another perspective, William White, Frederick Buechner and William Bausch, among others, provide insight which not only helps in the analytical process of viewing stories, but also inspires the continued use of, and reflection upon, story.<sup>11</sup> Bausch and White especially speak to the issue of imagination and look at the importance of communicating the individual's story as well as looking at the stories of other persons, and of those from faith traditions.

James Fowler, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Erik Erikson are also helpful in describing developmental processes in faith, moral, and psychological development.<sup>12</sup> In order to design a curriculum for young adults, it is important to know the characteristics of those within the intended community. Fowler provides some tools for discerning and anticipating the developmental level of individuals. From an historical and sociological

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<sup>10</sup> John Dominic Crossan, The Dark Interval (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> See William R. White, Speaking in Stories: Resources for Christian Storytellers (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982); Frederick Buechner, Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977); and William J. Bausch, Storytelling: Imagination and Faith (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> See especially, James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981); Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education," in Moral Development, Moral Education and Kohlberg, ed. Brenda Munsey (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1980); and J. Eugene Wright, Jr., Erikson: Identity and Religion (New York: Seabury Press, 1982).

perspective, Neil Howe and William Strauss, and Douglas Coupland write about young adults of the current generation.<sup>13</sup>

### Scope and Limitations

The culmination of this project is a short term curriculum resource for use with unchurched young adults. The project has a limited target audience of young adults born between 1961 and 1981 in the United States of America. While the age group may vary in either direction, and the same values may prevail in other cultures, information is not reviewed for young adults in other cultures. The project takes final form as a teaching manual for an unchurched young adult curriculum unit. The design incorporates extensive notes intended for use by the teacher/leader. Because of the narrative teaching method and emphasis on storytelling, hearing, and personal discovery, it is inconsistent to have a student booklet for this curriculum. It is intended that the teaching manual become a guidebook that will be for leading the young adults involved in the study group. The teaching/leading style is one of mentoring students through telling and listening to stories. The curriculum is created with particular attention to the needs of young adults not currently involved with church programs. The curriculum resource is developed in such a way that it can be repeated again and again with the same group of young adults and different story sets. While only one set of sessions is fully designed, the resource presented in this project can be used as a starting point for developing other studies for

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<sup>13</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, 13th GEN: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail? (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); and Coupland, Generation X.

young adults who desire to explore other issues within the Christian faith. In one sense, the curriculum represents a complete study, and at the same time, a study method of storytelling. The method is focused on investigating stories of others and claiming stories within one's particular faith tradition.

### Integration

This project integrates Christian education and Biblical study disciplines. Biblical methods of exegesis and exposition will be used to explore scripture. As well, literary analysis is used in exposition of folk stories, legends, fables and other story forms from outside the Christian faith tradition. Development of the curriculum relies heavily on research in educational methods, biblical and theological reflection, and analysis of the young adult generation from a developmental and descriptive point of view.

### A Brief Summary

Using demographic material and analysis of critical literature in the culture, a description of the target audience and their values and attributes is provided. The themes of hopelessness, affluence and self worth, and technology and interpersonal relations will be explored and faith responses to these themes will be described. Teaching methods appropriate to this young adult generation will be explored. Special attention is given to the unchurched experience of the young adult audience.

A theology of story is described as a foundation for the narrative process. The use of story in Christian education will be explored from a theoretical and historical

perspective. The background for the storytelling and hearing methods will be established. Exegesis and exposition of biblical stories used in the curriculum unit will be provided. As well, literary analysis and exposition of secular stories used in the curriculum unit will be provided. The curriculum is presented as a teaching manual for the study leader. The unit will include lesson plans, background reading, activities, and instructions for the teacher. A summary of the project including conclusions and implications for future study and additional applications is provided in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Audience

According to the 1990 Census, updated by data current to 1991, the young adult population of the United States is 79,276,000.<sup>1</sup> Of these, 33.7 percent of the households from which these young adults come "are not involved with their faith". "No religious affiliation or orientation" is claimed by 11 percent of the households. Another 31.5 percent of the households are "somewhat involved with their faith."<sup>2</sup> I believe one can say safely that over 35 million persons born between 1961 and 1981 in the United States are not actively involved in any religious tradition and could be open to faith exploration. This is the target audience for this curriculum resource. This chapter includes a definition of the problem addressed in this project, a developmental description of young adults, from a developmental and faith stages perspective, and a review of research regarding society, churches, and the future of religion in the United States. While an age range is defined in order to obtain census information and to acknowledge the uniqueness of this one generation, we must acknowledge that the descriptors of young adulthood that are used in the faith development discussions are sometimes associated with persons both younger and older chronologically.

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<sup>1</sup> U. S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1993, 113th edition (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Church Information Development Services, Church Ministry Profile Prepared for Sunrise Mountain United Methodist Church: March 24, 1993 (Costa Mesa, Calif.: CIDS, 1993), A12.

When this project was first conceived, the identified audience was young adults in the military, specifically the United States Navy. My interest in this area grew from my frustration as a Navy Chaplain with the inability to find Christian education resources designed for unchurched young adults. When I looked for resources for persons within the Church community, I could find little young adult material, and no material targeted specifically for military persons. NAVPRESS, the publishing arm of The Navigators, provides some material that can be used for military young adults, but it is intended to be used in their discipleship model of long-term one-on-one training.

When I left the Navy Chaplaincy, my interest in the area of young adult education resources continued, and so did my frustration. As I now searched for material from the point of view of a local church pastor seeking curriculum that would stimulate and attract uncommitted young adults from the community into the local church, I have discovered that the problem actually is larger than I realized. While some Christian education publishers are writing material targeted for young adults, notably the Baptist Sunday School Board, the curricula presuppose a Christian background or orientation. Materials that are designed for new believers look very much like doctrinal indoctrination pieces, and except for differences in artwork and layout, are much the same for children, youth, young adults, and adults. The type of material I need for my ministry with uncommitted young adults meets the participants where they are, does not presume any prior Christian education experience or knowledge of the Christian faith, and seeks to relate the life

stories of the individuals with the stories of the faith community. This kind of material does not exist, except in isolated pockets.

### A Theory of Generations

There is a story everywhere. The context has much to do with the formation of the story. In order better to understand young adults today, we need to understand their place in history, and their place among other generations that have come before them and will live after them. The term *generation gap* has been around for a long time. It is most frequently used to refer to the differences between one generation of parents and their children. While I want to be careful of clichés, the term is descriptive of the uniqueness of different generations and may provide insight into why there seems to be such little common ground between them. We also need an understanding of the gap that often exists between unchurched young adults and the generations that commonly make up church institutions, especially if we are going to develop models of ministry to reach them.

We all share a common humanity, and as Americans, we can even claim a common heritage. Yet there are differences in people born at different times. For example, we can easily accept that there would be a significant difference in the world view of children raised in frontier America and those raised in the current information age. Sometimes it is easy to identify similar experiences with other generations, and we join together in intergenerational celebrations. At other times, generational experiences are so uniquely different that we might as well be speaking foreign languages to one another. For most of



us the idea of a generation gap is a fuzzy concept that we can not quite define, even though we have at times felt some distance from our elders or younger.

In order better to understand the context in which we study the young adult generation and develop appropriate teaching methods and content, I want briefly to present a theory of generations developed by William Strauss and Neil Howe.<sup>3</sup> They go beyond a discussion of generation gap to illustrate patterns and principles of generational dynamics that are observable through time. Their model can help us better understand the distinctive nature of each generation, and the issues we need to explore in order to communicate faithfully the Christian tradition and experience to the unchurched young adult today. We need to be able to know something about ourselves in relation to young adults if we will adequately serve them.

Strauss and Howe's theory of generations has two central propositions. The first is age-location which demonstrates "how events shape the personalities of different age groups differently according to their phase of life, and how people retain those personality differences as they grow older." The second proposition is: "Generations come in cycles. Just as history produces generations, so too do generations produce history."<sup>4</sup>

Strauss and Howe go on to describe social moments which alternate between secular crises and spiritual awakenings. These events hit "people in different phases of life and help shape and define generations. Generations in different phases of life can together

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<sup>3</sup> See Strauss and Howe, Generations.

<sup>4</sup> Strauss and Howe, 35.

trigger a social moment and help shape and define history - and hence new generations."

Social moments are separated by two phases of life, or roughly forty to forty-five years.

There are four generational types: Idealist, Reactive, Civic and Adaptive. With only one exception during the Civil War generation cycle, they have always recurred in fixed order.

"During a spiritual awakening, Idealists are moving into rising adulthood while Reactives are appearing as children; during a secular crisis, Civics are moving into rising adulthood while Adaptives are appearing as children. Later in life, these generations trigger another social moment and thus keep the cycle turning." The first and third generational types are called "dominant in public life - Idealists through redefining the inner world of values and culture, and Civics through rebuilding the outer world of technology and institutions. The other two types are 'recessive' in public life, checking the excesses of their more powerful neighbors - Reactives as pragmatist, Adaptives as ameliorators."<sup>5</sup>

Each generation is approximately twenty-two years long. "The passage of four generations, Idealist through Adaptive, completes one full generation cycle over the course of four twenty-two-year phases of life."<sup>6</sup> Five generational cycles are traced from 1584 to the present. Three of the cycles--Colonial, Revolutionary, and Civil War--are fully ancestral; even with the latest birth year of 1859, there are no surviving members of these generational cycles. A fourth cycle, Great Power, represented 28 percent of the American population at the beginning of 1991, and an emerging fifth cycle, Millennial,

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<sup>5</sup> Strauss and Howe, 35.

<sup>6</sup> Strauss and Howe, 35.

includes the youngest 72 percent of the population. Within these cycles Strauss and Howe identify eighteen generations from the Puritan colonists to the present day Millennials.<sup>7</sup>

The five generations composing American society today are as follows:<sup>8</sup>

| <u>Generation</u> | <u>Type</u> | <u>Birth years</u> |
|-------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| G.I.              | Civic       | 1901-1924          |
| Silent            | Adaptive    | 1925-1942          |
| Boom              | Idealist    | 1943-1960          |
| Thirteenth        | Reactive    | 1961-1981          |
| Millennial        | Civic       | 1982-              |

The Thirteenth generation is the young adult audience for which this curriculum is designed. They are named thirteenth because they are the thirteenth generation after the Awakening generation of 1701-1723.<sup>9</sup> This generation was the first to include American-born persons of European ancestry. We must recognize that Native Americans were born in this country for many generations before 1701, but this date is used as a reference point in world history. While succeeding generations also include Native American persons and additional immigrants, the young adult today is in the thirteenth generation of those who could be American-born of European descent.

To further understand the complexities of the Thirteenth generation, we must have at least a working knowledge of the generation immediately proceeding, the Boom generation. I said at the beginning of this section that story is everywhere. It seems to me

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<sup>7</sup> Strauss and Howe, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Strauss and Howe, 84.

<sup>9</sup> Strauss and Howe, 31.

that one of the stories of young adults is found in their reaction to the Boomers ahead of them. One also needs to be aware that much of the critical commentary written about the Thirteenth generation is written by the Boom generation. To understand the gap or tension which seems to exist between these generations, I will therefore provide a brief overview of the issues and attitudes of the Boom generation.

The Boom generation, also called Baby Boomers, are the most market researched generation in history. These are the children born after the realization that the United States would prevail in World War II, beginning in 1943 through 1960. These people are now in the age group 34-55. They are solidly mid-lifers and are moving into institutional power. They are self-centered, and have a strong sense of right and wrong. They emphasize individuality, show a preference for deductive logic over scientific experimentation, and feel an urge to perfect inner spiritual self. They are the most nurtured generation of the twentieth century. Among Boomer preschoolers with working mothers, four out of five were cared for in their own homes, usually by relatives. Only 2 percent were cared for in institutional child care. They excel in positions of creative independence, such as the media, which is dominated by boomers in print, television, and movie production. They spawned the most active period of church formation of the twentieth century as their parents sought to provide religious instruction for them. They saw the most rapid inflation of report card grades coupled with a 17-year decline in SAT scores. In 1988 Boomers gave the greatest generational support to both Rev. Pat Robertson and Rev. Jesse Jackson in presidential primaries. Boomer notables include

Oliver North, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Moyers, and John McEnroe<sup>10</sup>. Bill Clinton is the first Boomer president.

The Boom generation were the most vaccinated generation we have had in this country. While this may seem like a small point, it is well to understand that the overprotection and nurture of the Boom generation is not the experience of the Thirteenth generation. The 13ers inherited a world already in decline as they came of age. The fascination with everything new educationally left this generation with a knowledge gap in traditional educational areas. They have been left to their own devices to make up the difference and have come to expect that no one will do for them and that they must do for themselves. What follows is a more detailed description of the Thirteenth generation.

### The Automatic Generation

Have you ever noticed how much prior generations are romanticized? For example, I cannot remove from my memory an image of young Abe Lincoln toiling all day with an ax, splitting fence rails, and studying late into the night by lamp, candle, or fire light. Do you ever wonder how to sneak a candle under the covers to read after bedtime? I do not remember the stories of Abe going to school, but he must have trudged miles through armpit deep snow. This is the way stories are told, romantically. I was raised in Phoenix, Arizona, and walked just over a mile to school each day. I have tried to

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<sup>10</sup> Strauss and Howe, 299ff.

convince my children of the hardships of my youth, but they have seen my parents' home, know where I went to school, and have never seen snow in Arizona.

While there is risk in making generalizations, we need a broad view of the audience to begin the descriptive process. The thirteenth generation of young adults today have experienced life differently from my boom generation. They learned to drive on automatic transmissions and think *standard* means stereo cassette radio, sunroof and air conditioning. They have never seen real black and white Television. When I Love Lucy or Mayberry RFD comes on the television, they think the broadcast is on the blink. The oldest members of the 13th generation were only 8 years old when Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon on July 20, 1969, and most young adults would rather watch the simulations anyway because they look more real. They are more comfortable with a computer than a book, can manipulate calculators that do quantum physics equations, but can't make correct change without the cash register telling them the amount.

Young adults of today have been short-changed by the automatic nature of their generation. Because of the ready access to computers and computer networks, video games, television programming, calculators, and multi-media education the young adult may not have been regularly exposed to reading and the imagination that reading cultivates. This generation has played with toys that can play by themselves. They may not have had stories read or told to them, but have probably seen more movies than their parents. Because much of their experience has been visual through film and video, they often have limited access to the worlds of wonder and fantasy that reading and telling

stories can evoke. While the generation of young adults has received the blessings of success and has had access to more information than has ever been available before, they have suffered the curse of unimagination. They have information that they cannot process because they cannot conceive of what to do with it. In many ways this is a isolated group of people who have become so self reliant that they are largely unable or unwilling to communicate or connect with others. At the same time that this is a curse, it is also a kernel of opportunity, for these young adults are tiring of the toys and beginning to seek meaning in their lives and in their culture. They are open to hearing the stories of the faith traditions, and they yearn, though they do not know the origin of the yearning, for the place to tell their own story.

### The Disconnected

Statistically, better than three out of five young adults were raised in a non-traditional home. They grew up in the age of divorce where being raised in a home with both biological parents was the exception rather than the norm. Many of them have been raised in single parent homes. Their striving towards the forms of success inherent in their parents generation has led to large numbers of families moving away from ancestral homes and communities in search of employment opportunities. As a result of having no relatives close who could provide care for a working mother, the advent of day care programs has evolved into a growth industry. Values actually shifted in their parents' generation toward a belief that it is better for a child to be cared for in institutional day care or pre-school

programs than be in the care of a relative. The nuclear family and values with which many church going mid-lifers today were raised are foreign to many, if not most, of today's young adults. It is not my intention to pass judgment on the society in which the thirteenth generation was raised, but to point out some of the background that forms the generational personality of the unchurched young adult. If generational theory is correct, and if today's young adult is unique, then we must take a unique approach in Christian education for young adults today.

This is a disconnected generation. Institutions and lifestyles that have been attractive to other generations are not stimulating to the young adult today. They do not go to church in large numbers, and when they do, they often seek out alternative worship experiences or religions. They tend to have few close relationships and may not have any life long friends at all. Serious students of this generation offer convincing arguments explaining why they are the way they are. This generation is variously called *Generation - X*, the *13th Generation*, the *High-Tech* generation, *Computer* babies, the *Scare* generation, and the *Lost* generation. Much has been written, mostly critical, of these young adults. Neil Howe and William Strauss sum it up well:

This generation - more accurately, this generation's reputation - has become a metaphor for America's late-twentieth century loss of purpose. Polls show that Americans of all ages have become broadly disappointed with our institutions, with our economic performance, with our sense of community, with our culture. We regret our today-fixation but are unable to shake it, and we fear for the future. Yet the caricatured image of our collective woes, the indelible icon of national decline, doesn't include the federally subsidized senior in a sunbelt condo or the mid-life swinger skipping out on his children or the ex-hippie professor waging old ideological wars at his students' expense. No, the image is a blow-up of only one figure: an eraser-headed kid with reflective shades, a backwards ball cap, and high-top sneakers, his Walkman tuned to heavy metal, a \$300 price tag dangling



from his designer leather jacket. That 13er is our manchild of the '80s. He, all grown up, is the future we fear.<sup>11</sup>

### A Few Attributes

Three main issues identified in common by several commentators will serve to set the scene in describing some common characteristics of the target audience. I have chosen these attributes from numerous others, not only because they are widely held, but also because they provide guidance for curriculum development. While certainly not observable in every gathering of young adults, these concerns will often be recognizable.

*Programmed for failure* seems to be the overriding issue in the disconnected generation. Howe and Strauss observe that this is “the only generation born since the Civil War to come of age unlikely to match their parent’s economic fortunes; and the only one born this century to grow up personifying (to others) not the advance, but the decline of their society’s greatness.”<sup>12</sup> Not only does this generation feel they will not do as well as their parents, but they have been presented with economic proof that there will not be enough jobs, paying enough, providing enough for the development of their future hopes. For example, as they came into the entry level part time job market as older adolescents, they find themselves in competition with retired senior citizens who have returned to the typical after school jobs to make ends meet on fixed income. The part time jobs that once were available for students are often filled by part time senior citizens, or even full time

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<sup>11</sup> Howe and Strauss, 13th GEN, Abort, Retrv, Ignore, Fail? , 23.

<sup>12</sup> Howe and Strauss, 7.

adults contributing to a two income family. There is no competition if the employer has the choice of a stable older adult or an inexperienced youth for the same wage. The young adult survived the assault on after school jobs and completed a college education just in time to find out that no longer is a college education a guarantee of a good job. Where at one time recruiters had offers for every graduate and the graduate could make a job choice, now graduates have difficulty finding recruiters and arranging job interviews. It seems that in every situation where this generation has come out well prepared for the challenges of this day, the rules change. While many persons of other generations suffered the loss of employment, corporate down sizing also has resulted in the reduction of once plentiful post-college jobs as well. The reactive nature of this generation will not be stopped. This generation has created entrepreneurs who will take great risks and as a result can compete with even the biggest of the corporate monsters.

My generation survived a time when we felt we would never live to be adults, so real was the threat of nuclear annihilation. The disconnected generation has a similar hopelessness, but not based on the impending doom of nuclear holocaust, but on the economic reality that they will barely be able to survive, if they can find a job at all. Good friends of mine have two adult sons, both in their twenties. Consider these two young men, not for the sake of generalizing to all young adults, but for the sake of seeing human faces. These young men are broken. Both are high school graduates, and each has had some further education or technical training. One is married to a woman 15 years his senior and he is now the stepfather of three teenage children. Both young men have

moved from one job to another, never finding any to be satisfying, mostly because none has paid better than minimum wage. Both are highly skilled technicians. They could rebuild your automobile engine or tune up your computer. This is natural for them. But they cannot find employment adequate to pay rent on a place to live, to drive a car and pay for automobile insurance, and to have anything left to buy groceries. They have explored military service, but find that it, too, offers little promise of advancement. Instead, it looks more like a holding pattern.

This is but one scenario. I deal with people on a daily basis who are living on the margin, just barely surviving from one paycheck to the next, and then only with the help of social service agencies, food banks, and neighborly handouts. When I see so much failure to thrive around me, in pretty normal and ordinary people, I begin to wonder what the future will hold for my children. Will they have the opportunities for education and employment and success? What does success mean to this generation? What about the generations to follow, what will they learn from these young adults?

Economics always serves to level the playing field. As soon as I have described folks who are barely surviving in entry level jobs, I also must point out that the disconnected generation is the most affluent generation that has yet been. The consumerism by this generation in the 1970s and 1980s is legend. This is the generation that invented \$70.00 pre-ripped jeans. It is also the generation that made *Walk Man* a household word and pushed auto stereo installations well above the \$1000 mark (and that is for a simple installation.) “This is the decade, says James U. McNeal, a consumer

behavior expert at Texas A&M University, of 'parent-blessed mini-consumers.' He's referring to the five- to twelve-year-old set spending \$4.2 billion a year of their own money on their own desires".<sup>13</sup>

Because money has never been a problem for this generation in their years of growing up, the realities of life do not seem as real to them. This generation is much more willing to take great risks for financial gain, as well as to do just about anything to prosper. They are a generation of materialism and virtually every determination of self worth is measured sooner or later by "what did it cost?" Because this generation has always been able to acquire material things in youth and may not be able to pay their bills as they come of age, a tension develops. The resulting strain is increased in a society that continues to measure success by the attainment of material things and to value employment in terms of what it will buy. They were raised to believe that they could get anything they wanted. Consumer credit is not a new thing to them. And yet, now, in many cases they cannot live up to their own expectations of themselves. The future is looking bleaker and bleaker, so what is the difference to them if they try to get all that they can now, and not worry about how to pay for the accumulation?

A case in point was a young man wanting to be engaged to a young woman in my congregation. Her parents liked the young man well enough, but did not think the two of them had much sense about what it was going to be like to be married. In the midst of our

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<sup>13</sup> Russell Chandler, Racing Toward 2001: The Forces Shaping America's Religious Future (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1992), 309.

trying to counsel with this couple about marriage, finances, and long term goals, the girl's father used the young man's bald tires as an example. "What are you going to do about the tires on your car, those are the kind of expenses that come up unexpectedly." The young man thought about it, and acknowledged the seriousness of driving with bald tires. Dad thought he had scored a direct hit with the young man, and that he was finally getting through. A few weeks went by and the bald tires stayed bald. Now Dad was worried about the use of the car. Asking when the young man was going to fix the tires, the groom-to-be explained that, on his salary, he could just not afford to buy the tires right away. This explanation was given after the young man had spent over \$300.00 the previous evening on Super Nintendo game gear. The young man has yet to see the connection between his Nintendo playing and the lack of tires on his car.

This is the technological generation. Many of them grew up with computers and have never really known using a typewriter. They are tuned-in to multi-media, arcade games, computer technology, robotics, television in all its forms, and every other kind of technological device. We have fed them interactive learning programs and immersed them in video presentations in school. Hours are spent glued to favorite television shows. All of this has been encouraged, often by well meaning parents who found in all of this a source of learning, entertainment and activity for their children. Further, these activities worked conveniently in the midst of their own busy schedules. A positive result of advancing technology is a generation of visual learners.

As a result of what I want to call *high-tech* overload, this generation learns how not to interact in real life. If you can play out your life in computer simulations or can learn from the Public Television channel, then why bother to spend a lot of energy on interpersonal communications. Relational skills are often very little exercised, and skills in reading, writing, and other non-electronic forms of communication are non-existent in some. While these young adults are very adept at solving any kind of computer crisis and are masters of the very latest computer game technology, they may not have appropriated very much common sense, and may have lost the ability to ask philosophical questions or enter into speculative discussion.

My wife is an educator in the public schools and was having behavior and attention problems with one young boy. In a parent-teacher conference, the thirteenth generation mother indicated she had lots of trouble with the child, as well as two other children, ever since their father had left them. "All he ever wants to do is play Nintendo," Mother said. Thinking this was an inroad to some behavior modification, my wife asked if the mother had ever thought about taking the Nintendo away for awhile, or restricting its use to times when homework and individual reading projects were complete. "Oh, he'd never stand for that", she said, "he'd be really angry with me." My wife allowed that the second grader would probably not be happy about losing some Nintendo time, but that if mother and teacher could work together to reinforce some study and reading skills, the child would prosper. "Why not try taking the Nintendo and putting it up on a shelf in the closet

for one week,” my wife asked. Mother was shocked. “But, I enjoy playing Nintendo, too,” she responded. “Some of our best time together is playing video games.”

Technology is wonderful when it enhances human life and interaction. But when life is technology, and there is little room for anything else, then that which can be good has come to control life itself. This disconnected generation has become so familiar with technological stuff that it can become one’s whole focus. As a result, the individual cannot or chooses not to communicate or even cope at times, with other people. It is far easier to retreat into the world of computer simulation games than it is to make and nurture friendships with real live people.

### Religious and Faith Development

Faith development normally takes place within faith communities. Therefore, studies of faith development may be imprecise in the context of curriculum development for the unchurched young adult who has had little or no contact with a faith community. As I read James Fowler and John Gleason, I realize that much of what they describe is normative faith development within the faith community.<sup>14</sup> We need to understand faith development and what the identified psychological and religious needs are in human development in order to design educational models for young adults. It is appropriate to recognize some universal faith or religious questions and issues that arise in all of

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<sup>14</sup> See especially Fowler, Stages of Faith; and John J. Gleason, Jr., Growing Up to God: Eight Steps in Religious Development (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975).

humankind, both within and outside of traditional faith communities. Theories of human development and religious or faith development, as well as analysis of the specific audience we seek to reach, are all part of the praxes out of which our curriculum design for unchurched young adults evolves.<sup>15</sup>

In Growing Up to God, Gleason describes eight steps in religious development. He bases his thesis on the theoretical framework hypothesized by Erik Erikson in his work, Childhood and Society. Erikson's human development framework includes eight life crisis. Gleason provides this helpful summary of his work: The first life crisis is to learn or fail to learn basic trust. The second life crisis is to learn or fail to learn autonomy. The symbolic question is: Who is in charge of me? The third psychosocial crisis is initiative versus guilt. In this stage one learns to play at roles within the basic family. The fourth crisis is industry versus inferiority in which the individual learns or fails to learn how to complete things and how to make things together with others in school or neighborhood. Crisis number five is one of identity. Symbolic questions include: Who am I? Am I male or female? What does it mean to be a human being? At this point the peer group takes on great importance. In the sixth life crisis, intimacy versus isolation is the theme. The individual learns to lose and find oneself in another. The seventh life crisis has to do with whether one contributes significantly or not. The primary issues in this middle adulthood crisis are personal industry and care for others. Finally, Erikson's last crisis has to do with

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<sup>15</sup> See Moore, Education for Continuity and Change, 182.



coming to a sense of integrity. "The question, 'Has life, my life in particular, been worth living?' is quietly answered in the affirmative with a sense of peace, meaning, maturity, and wisdom, or in the negative with bitter despair."<sup>16</sup>

As Gleason adapts these stages into his eight steps in religious development he theorizes the steps as follows: (1) Basic Trust and the Doctrine of God; (2) Autonomy and Good and Evil; (3) Initiative and Sin - Redemption; (4) Industry and Works; (5) Identity and Man; (6) Intimacy and Christology; (7) Generativity and Creation; and (8) Integrity and Eschatology.<sup>17</sup> If we view Gleason's work as a continuum, then the disconnected generation would largely be found at steps five and six. At step five the individual is working through issues of manhood or womanhood as well as identification as a human being.<sup>18</sup> In step six, the young adult is working through issues of intimacy with others as well as an intimacy or identification with Jesus Christ. This is a time for community building, commitment to others and commitment to a community of faith.<sup>19</sup>

While one cannot categorize all young adults of the disconnected generation in these stages of religious development, the observations of Strauss and Howe, Coupland and others seem to identify some of these same issues in the thirteenth generation. We

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<sup>16</sup> See Gleason, 18-20. Gleason draws on Erik Erikson's theoretical framework citing "Worksheet," *Psychological Issues*, 1 (1959): 166; and Childhood and Society (New York: Norton, 1950), chapter 7.

<sup>17</sup> Gleason.

<sup>18</sup> Gleason, 74 - 88.

<sup>19</sup> Gleason, 89 - 104.

have already recognized that this generation has abandoned institutional forms that served their parent's generations. I believe we can conclude that efforts to inform young adults in traditional language of their membership in human society, and to offer ways to intimacy with God and others through the Church will not work. The individual autonomy independence of this generation suggests their need to discover and explore new ways of relating and reconciling themselves with one another and the divine. This is not a generation that will be rushed, nor is it a generation that will accept doctrinal statements at face value. The key to the teaching moment will center around assisting the individual to discover their condition through interplay with others who may have walked a similar, but never the same, path.

The implications for religious education Gleason suggests center around trust, membership in community, other centeredness and acceptance of self. For the disconnected young adult, becoming aware of a need for meaning and intimacy with others could be a traumatic point in their development. This may be the point that brings the young adult into contact with the Christian faith, seeking to know how to be in community and to find or create meaning in their lives.

Fowler provides a different view of faith development. In his summary of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's work on describing religious experience, Fowler reviews his major conclusions this way:

1. Faith, rather than belief or religion, is the most fundamental category in the human quest for relation to transcendence. Faith, it appears, is generic, a universal feature of human living, recognizably similar everywhere despite the remarkable variety of forms and contents of religious practice and belief.

2. Each of the major religious traditions studied speaks about faith in ways that make the same phenomenon visible. In each and all, faith involves an alignment of the will, a resting of the heart, in accordance with a vision of transcendent value and power, one's ultimate concern.

3. Faith, classically understood, is not a separate dimension of life, a compartmentalized specialty. Faith is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions.

4. The unity and recognizability of faith, despite the myriad variants or religions and beliefs, support the struggle to maintain and develop a theory of religious relativity in which the religions - and the faith they evoke and shape - are seen as relative apprehensions of our relatedness to that which is universal.<sup>20</sup>

Fowler's seven stages of faith are as follows: Pre-stage - Infancy and Undifferentiated Faith; Stage 1 - Intuitive-Projective Faith; Stage 2 - Mythic-Literal Faith; Stage 3 - Synthetic-Conventional Faith; Stage 4 - Individuative-Reflective Faith; Stage 5 - Conjunctive Faith; and Stage 6 - Universalizing Faith. Because he has developed a research model and interview scheme, he is able to document where individuals of various age groups fall. The age grouping he uses that most closely approximates the young adult category I am describing is the 21-30 age group. In this Group of 90 interviews, 3.3 percent were at Stage 4-5, 40 percent at Stage 4, 33.3 percent at Stage 3-4, 17.8 percent at Stage 3, 4.4 percent at Stage 2-3, and 1.1 percent at Stage 2.<sup>21</sup> With 91.1 percent of the sample in Stages 3 and 4, these two areas will be illustrated more fully.

Stage 3 is described as an adolescent experience occurring as the individual begins to have awareness of self. The interpersonal world of Stage 3 faith is strongly influenced by *their expectations*.

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<sup>20</sup> Fowler, 9-15, cites Wilfred Cantwell Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, (New York: MacMillan, 1963).

<sup>21</sup> Fowler, 318.

This is not to deny that adolescents make choices or that they develop strong feelings and commitments regarding their values and behavioral norms. It is to say, however, that despite their genuine feelings of having made choices and commitments, a truer reading is that their values and self-images, mediated by the significant others in their lives, have largely chosen them."<sup>22</sup>

While young adults today may reject institutions and institutionalized ways, they also conform to the expectations of others in the social group. This is what is commonly called peer pressure and which most young adults will tell us does not affect them. They think they make their own, individualized decisions not influenced by others or what others think. Fowler adds that "when God is a significant other in the adolescent mix. . . the commitment to God and the correlated self-image can exert a powerful ordering on a youth's identity and values outlook."<sup>23</sup> The young adult at this stage has established beliefs and values which help to determine the choices made in life, and yet these beliefs and values are unexamined. This means that choices are made intuitively, with some sense of belief or value, but without knowing why those values serve to shape the choices made. "A person in Stage 3 is aware of having values and normative images. He or she articulates them, defends them and feels deep emotional investments in them, but typically has not made the value system, *as a system* the object of reflection."<sup>24</sup>

The Stage 4 individual is described as one who is at the beginning of young adulthood. Some of the hallmarks of this stage described by Fowler are that an individual

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<sup>22</sup> Fowler, 154.

<sup>23</sup> Fowler, 154.

<sup>24</sup> Fowler, 162.

must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes. Where genuine movement toward stage 4 is underway the person must face certain unavoidable tensions: individuality versus being defined by a group or group membership; subjectivity and the power of one's strongly felt but unexamined feelings versus objectivity and the requirement of critical reflection; self-fulfillment or self-actualization as a primary concern versus service to and being for others; the question of being committed to the relative versus struggle with the possibility of an absolute.<sup>25</sup>

The young adult as described in Fowler's Stages is an individual in extreme tension, both being defined by and rejecting the institutions and systems in his or her experience. The implications for religious education are that we need to work in the area of self discovery, and to give young adults opportunities to define what *I believe* versus what *they believe*. This is also an important time for people to begin to claim an identity with the divine and the absolute in life as one begins to experience the difference between relative and divine or absolute values. Prior to this stage, the individual has held strongly felt but unexamined feelings about values that have been informed by group or group membership. Now the individual begins to examine values more critically, as well as adopt a world view that takes into account others and service to them. The primary concern for self begins to give way to a concern for, and desire to be in, a more intimate community. Such a community is more than a peer group in that individual responsibility and commitment play a role for those in the circle of intimacy. The community may form around shared values and beliefs, desire to be in service to others, and/or desire for more meaningful interpersonal commitment.

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<sup>25</sup> Fowler, 182.

### Implications for Curriculum Development

Conclusions coming from social commentators and observers of faith development suggest that the young adult audience is very diverse, and at the same time, is dealing with some common issues of identity formation, acceptance/rejection of traditional value systems, and interpersonal relationship development. The high-tech affluence in which this generation was raised to young adulthood, and their uncertainty about their future, add to the abandonment and disconnection they feel. Because of a sense that the society is not interested in their well being, the young adult has become self reliant, resilient and detached. As we seek to design religious education resources, we must take into account the wary attitude and not be distanced more by it.

My initial response to the commentaries on this disconnected generation was to use some sort of high tech approach to curriculum development. As I reflected more on the needs of this generation, I realized that is exactly opposite the approach that is needed. I came to realize the need for identity development, introduction to faith traditions, models of commitment and service to others, and development of opportunities for interpersonal interaction with *real* people. Storytelling provides an excellent opportunity for intersecting with the lives of the disconnected generation. It is novel enough to be attractive and simple enough to be duplicated time and time again without being the same. Further, it provides for faith reflection and integration and interpersonal relationship development. The content and meaning of stories engages the young adult in faith

reflection and integration, or appropriation, while the process of telling and hearing stories serves to develop interpersonal relationships and build community.

Not many years ago, in a pastoral evaluation, my personnel committee was struggling with defining a needed change in my pastoral ministry. I knew some change was needed, but I could not determine what the new direction was either. Finally, the chairwoman of the committee almost exploded with the term, *higher-touch*. Her concern was that while I was available to the congregation, and my availability was well known and not subject to criticism, the quality of my availability was something else again. I was remote or aloof or distracted, and was not giving myself up to the pastoral side of my ministry. The simple identification of the need helped me to reorient my ministry and move toward a more sincere and authentic expression in my interpersonal communication.

What I feel is needed with young adults is a *high-touch* approach. The risk we must take is to let go of the leader or teacher role and become a facilitator, participant, and fellow seeker of the truth. In order to succeed with this approach, we must be sincere in wanting to participate with the young adult in their faith development. This is altogether different than an indoctrination process aimed at developing young adults into what we predetermine they need to be. I have come to realize there is a subtle, but I think extremely important distinction between indoctrinational and educational method. A simple dictionary review reveals the subtle importance of the difference between the two.

The words under analysis are indoctrinate and educate. Webster's defines indoctrinate as: "1. to instruct in doctrines, principles, theories, or beliefs. 2. to instruct;

teach." The word is derived from the Latin *indoctrinare* meaning to instruct in something.<sup>26</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary supplies this definition: "1. To instruct in a body of doctrine. 2. To teach to accept a system of thought uncritically."<sup>27</sup>

Webster's defines educate as: "1. to give knowledge or training to; train or develop the knowledge, skill, mind, or character of, especially by formal schooling or study; teach; instruct. 2. to form and develop (one's taste, etc.)" The Latin roots are given as *educere* and *educare*, which mean, respectively, to lead, draw or bring out and to bring up, rear, or train.<sup>28</sup> The definition in The American Heritage Dictionary is almost identical.

Indoctrinate, then, means to instill in the individual a specific set of doctrines or procedures without critical reflection. This method of teaching is not designed with the concerns or needs of the student in mind, but rather is interested only in communicating a body of information from the institution to the individual. Educate, on the other hand, focuses on drawing out or leading out or bringing the student into a knowledge of material. Education, then, implies interaction with the student, with the student's needs and best interests at heart. While the education process will communicate community norms, standards and traditions, it does so by methods that will draw the student out and into a dialogue with the material. Indoctrination seems to imply a process of disseminating the information into the student so that the student will appropriate it

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<sup>26</sup> "Indoctrinate," Webster's New World Dictionary, 1st College ed.

<sup>27</sup> "Indoctrinate," The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.

<sup>28</sup> "Educate," Webster's New World Dictionary, 1st College ed.



uncritically (unquestioningly). Indoctrination would be a good method of teaching if one wished to impart a certain set of rigid safety guidelines in working around dangerous tools, for instance. Because we have already determined the thirteenth generation young adult is cautious towards what the institutions have to offer, and has developed self-reliant styles of learning, we need to move toward a drawing-out process rather than a pouring-in one.

For a time while I was a Navy chaplain, I served as a chaplain at the Recruit Training Command in San Diego. My assignment was to the Receiving and Orientation section. The mission of this section of the Recruit Command was to indoctrinate the young men into the ways of the Navy as quickly as possible. The U. S. Navy is not called a uniformed service casually. When a young man arrived at the Receiving center, he was immediately given a new set of our clothes to wear and had his head shaved resulting in the removal, as much as possible, of any unique marks. He was to look and become uniform. The orientation process involved long days and short nights with the goal of breaking down individual habits in order to indoctrinate new patterns of living into the individual. Lest this sound too negative, I need to add that it is imperative in a military organization to have uniform and instantaneous response from the troops. In a hostile or dangerous situation, it would not be helpful for each individual to make a decision about how to act. One needs to think and act as a unit in order to survive. Clearly, this is not the teaching method needed to help lead the thirteenth generation young adult into dialogue with the Christian faith tradition. While the goal of the project is to bring

unchurched young adults to a knowledge and acceptance of the Christian faith tradition, the goal is to lead and not force.

In the field of general education, Gail De Vos, a storyteller and library educator, has provided significant insight into storytelling with young adults. While De Vos defines young adult as thirteen to eighteen, somewhat earlier than our thirteenth generation, the attributes and needs of the audience described apply to them as well. De Vos defines these special needs of young adults:

the need for entertainment and information, the need to belong, the need to learn in a social context, the need to experience responsibility, the need to establish a self-concept, and the need to communicate with adults who have an interest in them and their concerns (Amey 1985, 26). Storytelling, like reading books and watching films, is an activity that addresses these special needs by engaging the attention and the emotions of an audience. If the storyline works, the recipient enters into the story and identifies with a character or situation portrayed. It is by entering into the story and "living" it that young adults are open to the benefits of the experience.<sup>29</sup>

De Vos also provides thirteen key reasons for young adults to listen to stories. I believe these reasons provided parallel closely the issues of faith development and attributes of the thirteenth generation we have already related.

As an aid in the search for identity.  
As an aid in developing value systems.  
As an aid in establishing a sense of belonging.  
As an aid for individual contemplation.  
As an aid to encourage emotional release.  
As an aid in developing imagination.  
As an aid in entertaining.  
As an aid in creation of bonds.

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<sup>29</sup> Gail De Vos, Storytelling for Young Adults: Techniques and Treasury (Eaglewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1991), 1. See also Larry Amey, "The Special Case for YA Programming," Emergency Librarian 12, no. 3, 1985, 25-26, cited in De Vos.

- As an aid in developing listening skills.
- As an aid in preserving traditions.
- As an aid in remembering cultural stories.
- As an aid to exposing young adults to oral language.
- As an aid in developing discrimination.<sup>30</sup>

The needs of the young adult audience for identity, belonging, bonding, preserving tradition, contemplation and discrimination, as discussed in the faith development literature and in the analyses of culture, are linked with De Vos's list of reasons for using storytelling. Some of the other benefits of storytelling serve to reinforce community building and the articulation of faith. While community building is a stated goal of the curriculum unit designed in this project, articulation of faith is not, but would be a long term desired effect of the educational process.

Narrative Method is a more critical way of exploring the story telling process as it describes the many facets of how a process works to help make connection with faith and community. Mary Elizabeth Moore in Teaching from the Heart, begins a discussion of Narrative Method as follows: "I come to narrative method with another set of passions - passions for people to connect with other persons and events across time, to root deeply in the cultural and religious stories of their own people, and to cross boundaries into the stories of other peoples and the earth."<sup>31</sup> As Moore reflects on narrative method in theological terms, five important themes are identified. "First, imagination is being revalued as an important ingredient in education . . . A second theme is that narratives are

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<sup>30</sup> De Vos, 2 - 7.

<sup>31</sup> Moore, Teaching from the Heart, 131.

an important source of imagination . . . Yet another theme in the education literature is that narrative is a source of human consciousness and social critique . . . The fourth theme . . . is the idea that story is a form of indirect communication that conveys truths that cannot be communicated directly . . . One last theme . . . is the idea that stories have the power to form and transform the world."<sup>32</sup> For a disconnected young adult audience with extensive experience in technology, storytelling provides a bridge into a transforming community.

As a curriculum is developed for unchurched young adults, storytelling recurs as one of the most effective ways to engage the participant in reflection that will both inform and transform. For an individual to come to an awareness that his or her stories, beliefs and questions--which may be held without critical reflection--mean something to others in the present community and in the faith tradition is a moment of profound awakening. This is for me the great awakening when you suddenly realize that something strongly felt in your experience is felt by others or is common to a tradition. There is, at the same time, a sense of "Why did I not see that before?" If we can accomplish, through the use of story, the kinds of insights that awaken the young adult to a desire for more critical inquiry, much of the goal of this project will have been accomplished. The next step is to help young adults organize stories in such a way that they are helped to interpret the world, the community around them, and their identity within the community.

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<sup>32</sup> Moore, Teaching from the Heart, 138 - 43.

The storytelling method used in this project is meant to attract and engage the young adult in reflection on faith issues centered around stories from the Christian faith tradition. I will illustrate later how the story transforms and is transformed by the storytelling community. This is not a method that is easily measured by a final exam. James Michael Lee helps to define the curriculum design I am presenting. He defines process content as: "a generalized, dynamic, and usually 'intangible' content. 'Intangible' here does not mean abstract or ethereal; it means a content in motion rather than one which is congealed into a fixed state."<sup>33</sup> The storytelling method of this project is a dynamic process. By learning the storytelling method, lifelong learning potential can be implemented. By learning stories, connections can be made to tradition. Lee is quick to point out that process content and instructional practice are not the same thing.

Process content is wider than instructional practice. Instructional practice, it will be recalled, is structural content. As such, it represents a form of sheer process. Thus the pedagogical approach, styles, strategies, methods, techniques, and steps which the religion teacher uses are process contents in themselves . . . Religion as a way (process) of *thinking*, a way (process) of *loving*, and a way (process) of *living* also has its own process contents separate from (but in the religion lesson, not independent of) instructional practice or structural content.<sup>34</sup>

In the storytelling curriculum in this project, the young adult is presented with some content of the Jewish-Christian tradition in the context of Christian community. In this

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<sup>33</sup> James Michael Lee, The Content of Religious Instruction: A Social Science Approach (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1985), 78.

<sup>34</sup> Lee, 79.

way it is hoped that the process content of practicing community will reinforce the instructional content of the lesson.

What does a child recall about an elementary Sunday school class? Of course, we hope that the child retains some of the content of the lesson. But, also important are the attitudes and feelings that the child has assimilated by being in the classroom.

Remembering the Sunday school teacher, and the caring that was expressed and modeled for the student, is as important a dynamic as the subject matter of the lessons. At the risk of totally misunderstanding Lee, I want to suggest that the process content of storytelling - - the doing of it in a respectful and sensitive way, accepting and sharing stories and seeking ways of integration with tradition is as important as the doctrine that we seek to impart. "Process content is the hitting of the bull's-eye; product content is the hit bull's-eye."<sup>35</sup>

"Traditioning is understood as a process by which the historical tradition is remembered and transformed as the Christian community encounters God and the world in present experience and as that community is motivated toward the future."<sup>36</sup> As we seek to use a traditioning model for bringing unchurched young adults into relationship with the community of faith and the story collection of the Christian community, we need to be especially sensitive to our audience, their experience, and the story we bring to the teaching moment. In preparation for leadership of unchurched young adults we must be

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<sup>35</sup> Lee, 78.

<sup>36</sup> Moore. Education for Continuity and Change. 121.

aware of their lack of prior knowledge of the Christian experience. We must be aware of distorted Christian knowledge that they have. We must be aware of our own story set and be practiced in using it, not to convert others, but that so we know ourselves well as we begin the process of faith sharing with others. The traditioning process is story itself as we all gather at the intersections along our faith journey.<sup>37</sup>

Storytelling is not just a new way of doing old things: the communication of the traditions and beliefs of our Christian culture. It is engaging in a process that will transform both hearer and teller, and it has the ability to transform the world in which we live. Story is dynamic, and in the telling of story, another story unfolds. As we seek to bring unchurched young adults into dynamic dialogue with the Christian tradition, the storytelling method proposed in this curriculum is an effective way to meet the identified needs of this generation.

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<sup>37</sup> Moore, Education for Continuity and Change, 123 - 24.

## CHAPTER 3

### What is a Story?

What is a story? As I review the works of others writing and teaching in the area of Story and Storytelling, it is evident that there are a number of different approaches to the storytelling event and its meaning as well as numerous definitions of exactly what story is. My purpose in this chapter will be to give some definitions of story and story theology, describe analytical methods and typologies, set some limits as to what we can accomplish in a curriculum, and define my approach to teaching a story hearing and telling process that leads the young adult participant towards “connection” with the Christian tradition. This is one approach among many, but one that I believe can lead the uncommitted young adult towards an understanding of the Christian Faith and to Christian faith commitment.

As far back as we can reach in our study of humankind, language, and literature, storytelling has been with us. Story is used to communicate family and tribal history, origins, territory, mores, taboos, and beliefs. Cultures without written language were able to transmit societal rules and restrictions, beliefs, and traditions over long periods of time. The idea of parents teaching their children the ways of the culture through the telling of stories is not a new form of communication. We are rediscovering very important ways to communicate who we are to one another, our offspring, and other cultures through the use of what at first glance may seem to be very elementary or even primitive forms of communication.



The oral tradition in biblical study Draws upon storytelling as a universally used and accepted form of communication. Evidence suggests that some traditions passed on over many generations through oral communication maintain the essentials of form and content. Stories are also changed in their transmission by the communities or tellers through which the stories pass. When oral communication passes on law or creed, the content is sometimes carried more precisely than if relating the story of a local hero. For example, if the law is to restrain from stepping over this line, then however the story is told, the content (to avoid stepping over the line) is more apt to survive intact. On the other hand, if the story is about a boy who saves the town from a flood by plugging the dike with his finger, the story can take all sorts of twists and turns, with anything possible being added or subtracted, as long as the town is saved. Another modern example might be the transmission of rituals by a fraternal order. They will be memorized and carried forward in exact content and form. But if we were to hear the oral history of the same group from several different members, we could easily hear several different stories. When stories are held as highly important and are treated with great care in the preservation and communication of exact form and content, oral transmission of tradition becomes a very reliable way to preserve culture. Here is a sample story to illustrate what I mean.

Once upon a time, when our ancestors first claimed this land as their own, the land was covered with trees and the soil was full of rocks. Our ancestors cut the trees for the building of our ancestral homes and they began to break the sod under the trees and plant crops in the rocky soil. As they plowed their fields, the unearthed many rocks. At first large rocks were taken out of the field and piled along with tree stumps into fences along the fields edge. Later, the tree stumps rotted away and the stone fences served to corral the herds as they grew. Each

succeeding generation down to this day, as they plowed the fields, removed smaller and smaller rocks, filling in the cracks between the larger rocks of the fence rows. As our ancestors cared for the land, it became more and more fertile and provided abundantly for our ancestors' needs. They grew more and more prosperous, with great storehouses for their goods, and were known throughout the land for the richness of their soil and the plenty of their harvest. This is why today we have so many stone fences in our land.<sup>1</sup>

This is the way stories are told, often to explain the existence of notable landmarks, like stone fences. What is the story about? One explanation is that stone fences were a by-product of farming. Another interpretation focuses on how the ancestors worked the rocky terrain into rich and abundant farm land. Yet another version tells about stone corrals to contain growing herds. One rendition is that the stone fences resulted from removing the stones. Another is about the size of stones in the fences, and still another about storehouses, prosperity, and good farming skills. But why do we have fences in our land? Do we have them to mark out family farms, or to provide a place for the stones, or because stone fences are much more prosperous looking than wooden fences? Any one of these interpretations tells something about the people, and none of the versions is the right answer, nor is any wrong.

Another tradition of oral communication comes from the bards of Europe. They were not just storytellers for entertainment purpose, though they were very important persons in the king's court. They also served to communicate the news in a time when the only forms of communication were conversations between people as they traveled short distances from one town to another. The bard was more like a newspaper. By having a

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Burns, Jr., "Stone Fences," original unpublished story, 1994.

set of stories which told of the events of the realm, and by having access to other stories throughout associations with other bards, the traveling storyteller, singer, and entertainer would share the world news from town to town. One can easily imagine a community of bards, or a hierarchy with junior bards traveling about telling the stories of their mentors in their prescribed territories. This may have been like a modern phone tree, as good and as bad.

Another way to look at story transmission is by analogy. I have been amazed at the ability of curators in natural history museums to discover native American artifacts made out of materials from thousands of miles away. Great trade networks seem to have existed in very early times, and while individual groups did not necessarily range very far, they interacted with other traders who interacted with other traders, and so on across the country. Thus, a sea shell native only to the Maine coast could now be discovered as an artifact of an early tribe in Southern Mexico. A story could be like that. As it is told from one person to another, the story can travel, more or less untouched, to every corner of the world. If only part or pieces of the story arrived, they could be combined with other parts and pieces resulting in a whole new story.

### Toward a Theology of Story

It will not be helpful to universalize the concept of story by saying that story is everywhere around us, and in and about every waking moment of human existence. It is not helpful, but that is where we need to start if we will understand the far-reaching effect

story has on who we are, what we believe, and how we live. John Dominic Crossan states that life is story. All is story. There is no reality independent of our imagination. He suggests “that we live in story like fish in the sea.”<sup>2</sup> We need to recognize that everything we do, hear, experience adds to a continuing story that can only be described as my story. Story builds upon story, life effects life, community is the result of shared story. Let us be clear that calling life a collection of stories does not mean that life is imagined, but that we communicate the reality we know as we tell our stories and share in the stories of others.

John Navonne proposes that before we become storytellers, we are, from the first conscious moment of life, story-listeners. Our quest throughout our life is to listen for the story that is our true story. He submits that one story is not enough to explain the meaning of the life of Jesus, our relationship with God and our personal inter-relationships. Many stories are told, and in combination, move us toward a point of grasping the one true story that connects us for all time with our God. Navonne indicates that the one pivotal point in the great stories is Jesus Christ, who has come to tell and be the story of redemption and reconciliation.<sup>3</sup>

Navonne suggests that John’s theology of the Word of God is an implicit theology of story. He says that this theology is laid out succinctly in what he calls a loose paraphrase.

Fundamental to every life is story. The Storyteller, the giver of stories, calls forth every life to tell his truly good story. To say that the storyteller was in the

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<sup>2</sup> Crossan, 31.

<sup>3</sup> John Navonne. Seeking God in Story (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990), 183.

beginning is to say that there was the intention of a truly good story, a universal story embracing all life stories. All lives are created narratable, and there is no life that is created without the intention of its becoming a truly good story. Our life is the search for our true story within the Storyteller's universal story. Truly meaningful life stories shine out across the threat of absurdity, for absurdity has not destroyed them. Each life is created as an incipient story, for the Storyteller loves to tell truly good life stories and from the beginning has given the world its shape through them. But the world has not recognized his intention of telling truly good stories. Even man, the bearer of an incipient story, has rejected its promise. But all those who have responsibly accepted their incipient story, and believe in its promise have been enabled to become the truly good life stories of the Storyteller. And this has happened not in the natural course of evolution or through our independent efforts at storytelling, but through the grace and demand of the Giver of life stories. For the meaning of the truly good life story has been defined in the story that a particular life has told, in which there is grace and truth; and we have seen in this life story our ultimate possibilities for the true story towards which every incipient life story moves - the glory of the true life story told and the glory of the Storyteller. (John 1:1-5, 9-14)<sup>4</sup>

In a very traditional view, Navonne maintains that we seek our true life story in the Christian faith by listening to the story of Jesus Christ who is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). We come to know our true life story by as we come to know the true life stories God is telling through his pre-existent Word.<sup>5</sup>

A more active theology of story is offered by Sallie McFague. She states that the primary form of story in the New Testament is parable. Not only does Jesus tell metaphorical stories - parables to call the hearer to decision about the nature and purpose of God, but Jesus also is the Parable of God. The parable is a way of believing and living that at first seems ordinary, but if the parable works, it will totally disrupt "normal" living. When the parable is "heard" the listener loses control of the familiar ordinariness of the

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<sup>4</sup> Navonne, 54.

<sup>5</sup> Navonne, 186 - 87.

story of their own life and sees another story--another way of believing and living. Catching sight of this new way of believing and living creates another context for their lives and suggests new possibilities for living.<sup>6</sup>

In this project, I adopt a somewhat traditional theology of story. We are attempting to bring the uncommitted to an understanding of the Christian gospel. Since this is the goal of the curriculum, I do not want to stray too far away from what we might refer to as “core” Christian theology. We affirm that God is omnipotent and is the creating and sustaining presence in creation. We affirm that God, throughout our faith history, has sought relationship with humankind by establishing covenant with humankind to provide and bless. We affirm that God personalizes this relationship and intersects human history in the person of Jesus, the Christ of God. Jesus, in addition to sharing the message of reconciliation, also provides models, through his teaching and living, for how we are called to act in our relationship with God.

The theological position I take for story is similar to Crossan’s view that all is story. I don’t pretend to know anything about how other forms of the created order think, see, reason, or whatever brain activity is properly called. Throughout my educational upbringing, however, I have been taught that Humankind is set apart from all of the rest of creation by its ability to think and reason. Certainly science has proven that other species have some ability to reason, but I don’t think of my dog having stories to tell, or much faith history and tradition to communicate. All this to say that perhaps the one thing that

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<sup>6</sup> McFague, 77 - 79.

sets humankind apart from the rest of creation is our ability to hear and tell stories and to support life by passing on our history, culture, and tradition. While my dog and, indeed, all of the created order, including plants and other animals are part of the story, and can affect and be affected by the changing story, humankind is teller and hearer. The story of our origin, the story of our journey through life, and the story of our relationship to our creator may best define what “human” is about.

Twice in my life I have gazed into the eyes of people who I would describe as evil. In my role as chaplain in a military prison I had occasion to come in contact with all kinds of persons. While some of the prisoners were involved in serious crime, many were simply confused and misdirected young adults, who, in the civilian world, may have been fired from their jobs, but were not criminals. The two occasions when I faced evil face to face were scary experiences. One man was a murderer, the other was a drug dealer and smuggler. While I became friends with the smuggler, I would never turn my back on him. He would just as soon steal from me, maybe even hurt or kill me, as have a pleasant conversation about the weather. The other man was very distant, and I never could get close to him. Whenever I was in his presence, I felt a chill, an actual coldness about him. When I gazed in both men's eyes, I saw nothing. There seemed to be no life, no hope, no future. I wonder about the stories of these two lives. What in their experience our history caused them to withdraw so completely from those around them? What had they learned from the world around them that contributed to their anti-social behavior? What pain, or sorrow, or suffering, or distorted world view was hidden behind those deep, unattached

stares? While my conclusion is based on perception and feeling, I wonder what stories of these two men have added to or subtracted from their true humanity. One can look and act like a human being, but with broken or distorted stories, one may carry a lifelessness and disregard for human relationship that is absolutely heartbreaking.

### Structure and Analysis

In order for us to make use of storytelling and hearing, we need some structure for analyzing the stories of our life. Borrowing heavily from Sheldon Sacks in his book, Fiction and the Shape of Belief, Crossan describes a fivefold typology of story. Sacks uses three types for critical analysis of eighteenth century prose writers. First, satire: "A satire is a work organized so that it ridicules objects external to the fictional world created in it." Second, apologue: "An apologue is a work organized as a fictional example of the truth of a formulable statement or a series of such statements." Third, represented action: "An action is a work organized so that it introduces characters, about whose fates we are made to care, in unstable relationships which are then further complicated until the complication is finally resolved by the removal of the represented instability."<sup>7</sup> Crossan adds his typologies of Myth and Parable:

Myth has a double function: the reconciliation of an individual contradiction and, more important, the creation of belief in the permanent possibility of reconciliation. Parable also has a double function which opposes that double function of myth. The surface function of parable is to create contradiction within a given situation of complacent security but, even more unnervingly, to challenge

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<sup>7</sup> Sheldon Sacks, Fiction and the Shape of Belief (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 24-25 as quoted in Crossan, 41.



the fundamental principle of reconciliation by making us aware of the fact that we made up the reconciliation. Reconciliation is no more fundamental a principle than irreconciliation. You have built a lovely home, myth assures us; but, whispers parable, you are right above an earthquake fault.<sup>8</sup>

Crossan summarizes the fivefold typology of story like this: "Myth establishes world.

Apologue defends world. Action investigates world. Satire attacks world. Parable subverts world."<sup>9</sup>

Myth is not used in this paper in the sense that we find it in ordinary usage. Myth implies untruth, or a stretch of the imagination, or sophisticated lying. Myth is also not a literary form that tells fairy tales of gods and goddess and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Simply put, Myth is a story form that serves to explain or establish why things are the way they have come to be. Myth in this sense implies stability. Thus, when we speak of an "origin myth" we are talking about a story that tells how something or some people came to be. The factual nature of the story is not at issue. The story is the reality in this discussion, so by definition, the story is true.

The structure of myth and a very sophisticated structural analysis of myth is offered by Claude Lévi-Straus in the classic work Structural Anthropology. For our purposes in the development of this curriculum, the structural analysis is far too complicated. Lévi-Straus does, however give insight into the repetitive nature of myth. "The function of repetition is to render the structure of the myth apparent . . . Thus, a

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<sup>8</sup> Crossan, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Crossan, 42.

myth exhibits a 'slated structure' which comes to the surface, so to speak, through the process of repetition."<sup>10</sup> Lévi-Strauss also reaffirms the purpose of myth "is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if, as it happens, the contradiction is real)."<sup>11</sup> So, in the case of an origin myth where the contradiction exists between man made by God and man born of woman, the myth grows by repetition to include an unlimited number of possible variants, all on the same theme.

Parable is a form of story that seeks to interject contradiction into reality. It is the opposite of myth in that where myth seeks to bring stability, parable seeks to unsettle the status quo. While myth tells the story of how things are, parable calls into question the way things are, and sets in motion the seed of discontent. Parable often seems to take our breath away, or bring us up short, because this story form calls into question why it is that we think we are in control of our reality. If the accepted tradition is that good people are always rewarded for their virtue, then parable would come along and tell the story of how the bad were rewarded or how the virtuous were not rewarded. The Myth would be the reconciling story that seeks to keep alive the accepted tradition that the good are always rewarded for their virtue.

The primary forms of storytelling used in the analysis of traditional stories in this curriculum will be myth and parable. The other forms are described in order to provide handles for the identification of other story forms that may surface in the storytelling

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<sup>10</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963 ), 229.

<sup>11</sup> Lévi-Strauss, 229.

process. Participants in this study need to see that their stories do have a place within the continuing spectrum of story types. If we do not place their story within the continuum of types and forms, then we risk further alienation of persons we are seeking to attract into the Christian faith tradition.

### Curriculum Limitations

The scope of this project is to develop a short term curriculum that will introduce the participant to the story process. It is not my plan, nor do I think it is feasible, to teach the history and theory of story, and how to apply that theory to the living of one's life. It is also not possible to present all of Christian theology in a curriculum of this type. Through introduction of major themes, the young adult may begin the dialogue process which will result in further faith exploration. My hope is to begin to put the participant in touch with stories: stories that already exist in one's life, as well as stories of the traditions around us.

One of the most obvious limitations of the curriculum process is the imagination of the participants. We cannot get inside the mind of others anymore than we can really describe what is going on inside the brain of another species. While we can introduce and model the process of story hearing and telling, there is no way to control the participants' response to the process. Further, if we are involved in education and discovery, we would not want to control the response, for then it would not genuinely belong to the respondent. The hearts and minds of young adults cannot be opened for imagination to be surgically implanted. It is not possible to create imagination for others. But we can

stimulate the imagination that is already created in us. By teaching young adults to have fun with stories, they can be encouraged to let go of their analytical, skeptical nature long enough to be overcome by the joy that comes through their imagination. For this generation, cursed with unimagination, perhaps the most profound teaching moment is when people discover how wonderful it is to imagine.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that the thirteenth generation is one raised with toys that play with themselves. I commented on how this chokes the imaginative play process in children, resulting in adults with inhibited imagination skills. One of my favorite stores in the shopping mall where I walk is called Imaginarium. It is a place with the most extraordinary entrance. Within the powerful looking marble doorway, complete with 3/4 inch plate glass double doors supported by unobtrusive pivot points at top and bottom, is a wonderful parallel doorway, no more than 3 1/2 feet high with the same scaled down plate glass doors, brass pivots and pulls. Clearly, this store is inviting little people to come in and look! And when you get inside, all of the toys and projects sold require your help. They require imagination to make them work. There are toys like wooden pull trains, blocks, Lincoln Logs and Legos. In contrast, another store in the same mall sells toys that do not need you. They are so complicated, loud, and electrified that they can almost play by themselves. Is it not true that the most cherished toys for most of us, and those cherished by our children, are not the most sophisticated but the most simple. Our curriculum needs to lead young adults to develop the imagination that comes with pull trains, blocks, and Lincoln Logs.

### Story as Strata

The curriculum approach I am using is best suggested by the strata in a rock formation. Near my home in Las Vegas is an outcropping of rock that scientists say is among the oldest rock formations on the earth. I learned recently that it is called the Great Unconformity and represents 1.2 billion years that are missing from the geologic record in Southern Nevada. This special outcropping was formed by cataclysmic up thrusting of material inside the earth causing the surface layers which once were the bottom of a great sea to be lifted up into dramatic mountains with distinctive layers of rock exposed. Geology students from all over the world come each year to study the Great Unconformity. As I think about the strata in our area and the way we can teach through stories, an analogy is clear.

Consider the analogy. The rock layers are formed in an ordered way, revealing the history of the earth. In most cases, unless geological movement or weathering has left them upside down, the layers represent a continuum of geological development. The oldest layers are on the bottom, the newest on the top. Each layer is a unique representation of a period in geologic history. When several layers are studied together, they form a larger story and show the different characteristics represented by layers from each period. At the same time, the rock layers are also lineal, with one section of a given layer slightly different from other sections, when viewed from the edge. What we have is different types of rock, formed at the same relative time with different characteristics but found in the same layer. We need to be careful not to give any greater importance to one

layer of rock over another. A layer of rock is a layer of rock until we approach the formation with specific questions or theories, at which time one layer may become more important only for the purpose of one specific study.

What we have in rock strata is both horizontal and vertical history. The layers of rock are also interdependent on one another. While a layer can be analyzed independently of the rest of the rock around it, part of what makes it unique is determined by the other rock around it. One can discover both independence and interdependence at the same time, and in the same strata. Also, the earth and all of its surface is still changing. Some would say that the reforming of the earth's surface is part of a continuing creation. At the very least, we must observe that material continues to be added and subtracted from the surface and exposed strata by natural forces. The strata, in one sense, is complete and, in another sense, is still being formed. The analysis of a single layer of a geological structure is like snapshot of that strata. When another geologist comes back to the exact same location in the future, the strata will not be exactly the same. At the same time, the overall analysis of a geological region is more like a moving picture. It includes a full development of the plot as the drama is played across the screen.

Stories can be viewed in the same way. While a story has a life of its own, stories are rarely heard out of the context of surrounding stories. The process of storytelling reveals other stories that come out of the experience of the storyteller. The process of story hearing reveals stories that come out of the experience of the listener. While a story is complete in itself, the story can also be viewed in a larger context of its place in a lineal

and historical context. Stories are being told and reformed as we tell them. And in each telling, some of who we are is revealed in the telling and preserved in the story left behind. No single story is more important than any other single story. When we put stories into a frame of reference or seek to develop a theory based in story history, then we may assign varying significance. Foundationally a story is a story is a story. If the curriculum approach proposed in this project is to be effective, we need in every way possible to lift up the value of each story, each component part, and each context in which a story appears. To do otherwise is to project a story hierarchy, and this could be demeaning to the stories and the storytellers engaged in the study process.

Since the intent of this curriculum is to engage the “disconnected” young adult with the stories and traditions of the Christian faith, the study must begin with telling and listening to the stories of participants. We will move quickly from practicing storytelling and listening to the sharing of specific kinds of stories. The intent is to telescope the time needed for thorough story analysis in order to move to story types that can be related to traditional stories. I accept the compromise inherent in this decision. The audience I wish to reach does not generally give unlimited time and attention, so time is an important element in this decision. Because of the time and attention constraints, we must adopt a teaching method which is at the same time directed and facilitated. In order to introduce the concept of storytelling and hearing, the method must include sufficient time for young adults to warm up to the process and become freely involved in sharing stories. On the other hand, in order to sharpen the focus and to move into dialogue with stories from the

Christian tradition, the movement among stories must be directed. We cannot just open up Bible stories and life stories and simply go exploring without focus. The integrity we bring to the study is formed in when we allow individual young adults the room to explore stories and also present Biblical material in a well prepared exposition.

The goal of the study is to move the participant to an awareness of stories in our individual lives and in the larger community. By helping the participant achieve an awareness of stories, we begin an ongoing process of faith exploration and development which moves young adults from the position of observer in a society in which they believe they are abandoned towards identity with and in a community of faith. The discovery of stories and the use of them to connect with tradition puts the participant in the position Sallie McFague describes in her study of parable.<sup>12</sup> When we become aware that the world in which we live is full of stories, and that our story intersects and fulfills the stories of tradition, we are brought to the place where we can discover our true humanity in the stories of our traditions.

If story is like rock strata and if learning takes place at the intersections of our lives, then our story will be created and recreated, formed and reformed at those places where story edges up against story, which edges up against story. As we change the story (strata), then the edges have also to change, and, in a sense, a new story is formed along the edges. Crossan gives this allegory as the context for his discussion of story theology and his assertion that all is story:

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<sup>12</sup> McFague, 77 - 79.



Once upon a time there were people who lived on rafts upon the sea. The rafts were constructed of materials from the land whence they had come. On this land was a lighthouse in which there was a lighthouse keeper. No matter where the rafts were, and even if the people themselves had no idea where they actually were, the keeper always knew their whereabouts. There was even communication between people and keeper so that in an absolute emergency they could always be guided safely home to land.

Crossan calls this the classical vision. He goes on to say that the classical is destroyed by a rumor one day that said: "There was no dry land, so how could there be either a lighthouse or a lighthouse keeper."<sup>13</sup> Crossan puts his argument, "all is story," in a second version of the story:

There is no lighthouse keeper. There is no lighthouse. There is no dry land. There are only people living on rafts made from their own imaginations. And there is the sea.

He goes on, "There is only one possibility left, and that is what we can experience in the movement of the raft, in the breaks in the raft's structure, and, above all, what can be experienced at the *edges* of the raft itself. For we cannot really talk of the sea, we can only talk of the edges of the raft and what happens there. Our prayer will have to be, not 'Thank God for edges,' but 'Thank edges for God.'" Crossan concludes, "My suggestion is that the excitement of transcendental experience is found only at the edge of language and the limit of story and that the only way to find that excitement is to test those edges and those limits."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Crossan, 25 - 26.

<sup>14</sup> Crossan, 28 - 30.

In my walking mall there is also a store with a great tee shirt display in the window. Most of the tee-shirts have slogans on them, some of which are unprintable. One caught my eye on my morning walk, and helped me to understand what Dominic Crossan is saying. The tee-shirt reads: "If You're not Living on the Edge, Then You're taking up Too Much Space." As my proposed curriculum leads unchurched young adults through the discovery of story in their lives, in the lives of their families and tribes, and within the traditions of the communities around them, the participants may move toward the transcendental experience that Crossan describes as the *edge of story*. Whether we speak of the cutting edge, the leading edge, the edge on the competition, the edge of the rock strata, or the edge of the raft, we find that stories lead us to of edges. I look forward to moving young adults closer to the edge, because *If You're not Living on the Edge, You're taking up Too Much Space!*

## CHAPTER 4

### The Biblical Stories

#### The Process

If we are going to help unchurched young adults with no prior knowledge of biblical tradition to move toward a faith perspective, then the stories we use in the curriculum resource must intersect their needs. The storytelling method in Christian education is a multi-level experience. If Crossan is correct, and all life is a story, then the study of bible stories is in itself another story.<sup>1</sup> I introduced the idea in Chapter 3 that a geological formation could be seen as an analogy to stories with many layers. We do not unpack the layers, but rather seek to see them in their setting and to discern how they interact and have interacted across history with the stories around them.

The young adult may be ready to intersect a story at a far different place from where the leader/teacher intersects the story. If we are going to be honest to the teaching moment, we need to appropriate a style of story analysis that draws upon responsible biblical scholarship but is not so authoritarian as to give the story answer to the seeking young adult. My personal bias is towards a curriculum that has stories which provide answers for the great questions of life. However, as I have studied the thirteenth generation, it is clear that we will not engage and attract these young adults towards the institutional church with anything less than an honest and open dialogue. This generation of young adults is wary, and they have too often seen insincerity in the institutions, such as

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<sup>1</sup> Crossan, 29.

the Church, which seek to enroll them for their cause. We must present a responsible process of story analysis which allows the young adult to dialogue with the story. Only by their ownership of the story can we hope to engage them in faith commitment. I have pointed out several other places in this paper that 13ers will do things their way, or not at all. They are not belligerent or hard to work with, but they will not blindly accept the position of earlier generations.

If we can imagine a cross section of the Great Nonconformity rock formation near my home, we can see a number of layers exposed at once. Like stories, each section and layer is unique. Even the missing sections which should be there, and are not, tell story. We do not need to uncover story so much as we need to examine it where it is, in context, so to speak, and review how others have intersected the story throughout history. An awareness of how stories are transformed in their telling helps us to understand the process content of this curriculum. There is a fine line between leading students to discovery, and discovering that students are being lead nowhere. How do we say that it is acceptable to explore and dialogue and question and, at the same time, direct the student toward acceptance of traditional biblical views of themselves and their world? This curriculum resource cannot deal with all the issues of faith, and so will be limited to just three areas that seem to be of profound importance in this generation.

As I look at the Biblical stories in this curriculum, using traditional forms of reflection and commentary, I want to keep in mind the need to communicate tradition but in a way that first takes into account the story set the young adult brings to this discovery process. I do not mean to suggest that we can know the story sets of individuals, but I do

believe we can design the curriculum by using stories that would likely intersect the commonly held values suggested by social scientists and religious educators. As a pastor, my desire in all of this is to discover more effective ways to share the Christian gospel that honor the identity and integrity of the individual young adult. To this end, I trust this story set with which we begin will open up the discovery process for young adults of the thirteenth generation.

### Criteria for Story Selection

The needs I have identified in young adults of this generation are need for identity, need for community, need for intimacy and need for service to others. To this end, I have identified six biblical stories for use in the curriculum which each seek to address one or more of these issues. As I struggled with the length of the study, I knew that an underlying issue with young adults is their desire for commitment and their unwillingness to commit to anything. That sounds like a paradox, and it is. While young adults want to make commitments and value identification with some deeper meaning for their lives, they also are fearful of commitment, and initially will interact in a very superficial manner. We need a small set of stories that can communicate some of the essentials of the Judeo-Christian tradition, draw young adults to identify, and provide rationale for participation in Christian service.

The first two stories I have chosen are pre-historical stories. The creation story from Genesis 1 and the Great Flood story from Genesis 6:11 - 8:22 are stories that help the young adults identify who they are. The flood story is enthralling for its largesse,

universal appeal, and message of community between God and humankind. The second set of stories are stories of covenant, promise, hope, and trust. Genesis 12:1-4a, 6-9, Abraham's call and migration, and Exodus 16:1-36, the story of the manna in the wilderness, help to identify God's promise and promise keeping. The last two stories from Jesus' parables are chosen because they reveal the power of compassion, practical ethical service, and reconciliation. Luke 10:29-37, the parable of the good Samaritan, is chosen with the practical heart of young adults in mind. They are asking *how* and are eager to engage in service opportunities while other generations stand around asking *why*. The parable of the prodigal son, Luke 15:11-32, is chosen because of its representation of reconciliation. While I think we have to talk in terms of separation and reunion, those issues of estrangement and longing for relationship are strongly held among the thirteenth generation.

If the study series seems exceedingly short, and the story choices very limited, it is because they are. I struggled for many months over how many sessions we could expect to capture the interest and commitment of unchurched young adults. I moved from 13 sessions (the traditional Sunday school quarter) to ten to four to seven or eight and finally arrived at six. There is nothing magic about the number. I hope in a relative short set of sessions to capture the imagination of young adults for further study. I hope by raising some faith issues we will open up lines of communication to more dialogue. I hope most that by keeping the length of this study short, young adults will engage in it and will seek more. My experience to date tells me that this approach is a good one. Young adults are afraid to build community and identify, but in the few weeks that it takes them to make the

connection, they feel a solid sense of home. I believe this curriculum will be a launching point for further faith exploration. The story sets can be different, the purpose can move toward seeking a faith commitment from young adults. For now, this curriculum design will fill a critical niche as we seek to reach out to young adults, who, for whatever reason, are now separated from the Church.

### Primeval Stories

The first two stories with which we deal are located in what Speiser calls Primeval History.<sup>2</sup> This first part of Genesis continues from the first chapter through the end of chapter 11. "The patriarchal narratives take up four-fifths of the entire book, yet they cover only four generations of a single family . . . Primeval History seeks to give a universal setting for what is to be the early history of one particular people."<sup>3</sup> The Genesis account of creation seems to follow the traditions of Mesopotamian civilization, which is not surprising since Mesopotamia was the dominant culture of the day. A distinct difference is that Mesopotamian creation stories have a number of deities involved in the creative process, while in Genesis, there is but one God. The authorship of the creation account in Genesis 1 is attributed to the Priestly source by von Rad and others.<sup>4</sup> "Nothing

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<sup>2</sup> E. A. Speiser, Genesis, vol. 1 of The Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), liii

<sup>3</sup> Speiser, liii.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard von Rad, Genesis: A Commentary (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 45.

is here by chance; everything must be considered carefully, deliberately, and precise . . .

Nowhere at all is the text only allusive, 'symbolic,' or figuratively poetic."<sup>5</sup>

In verses 1 and 2 reference is made to the chaos out of which the world was created. While this chaos may refer to Mesopotamian notions of chaos and floods, there is still a clear declaration that something, this world, was created out of nothing, and while creation may have moved through chaos at inception, it was still a deliberate act of the creator who was in control.<sup>6</sup>

Westermann provides a very helpful construction for reflection on the order of creation. For if there is a story within the story of the creation event, it is that the one God is in charge, and that the creative process represents God's orderliness and concern for the created order. "God is one who acts. Reality exists only because God acts."<sup>7</sup>

Westermann breaks the rest of the creation story into three phases: 1:3-10 Three separations; 1:11-25, Three (Four) Quickenings; and 1:26-31, The Creation of the Human Race. The Three Separations are the alternation of night and day (time), the creation of the firmament (distinguishing above and below), and the division of the land and the water (distinguishing here and there.) The Three Quickenings are interrupted after the creation of the plants by the creation of the heavenly bodies. This is where he Westermann gets (four) quickenings. After the creation of plants is the creation of animals, followed by the

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<sup>5</sup> von Rad, 45.

<sup>6</sup> von Rad, 48.

<sup>7</sup> Claus Westermann, Genesis: A Practical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 8.



creation of the terrestrial animals. The final section is especially set off by the words "let us" in order that the Priestly writers can make it clear that humankind is to be in special relationship with God and that humankind will be given special dominion in creation.<sup>8</sup>

An overarching feature of the creation story is the Priestly schools clear insistence that everything was created by God; there is no creative power apart from him. A second issue is that humankind is at the very end of the succession of creation. 'The world is oriented toward man, and in him it has its purest direct relation to God. The simplest consequence of this statement is that man, therefore, cannot seek his direct relation to God in the world, in the realm of nature.'<sup>9</sup> The other principal that clearly stands out in the creation story is that all of creation was created good, very good. "In God's sight the entire creation is good, in spite of all that seems incomprehensible cruel, and terrible to human beings. The goodness of creation is based solely on God's authority; what it is good for, such as it is, only God knows. But because it is good in God's sight, joy in God's creation is set free in human beings."<sup>10</sup>

If we have discovered the meaning of the creation story as intended by those who recorded it, we would have to conclude that, simply stated, God created all that is, out of nothing, and that all that God created is good. God has a special relationship with Humankind to whom God gives authority over creation. It remains now for us to discern the meaning for this present generation.

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<sup>8</sup> Westermann, 8-12.

<sup>9</sup> von Rad, 64.

<sup>10</sup> Westermann, 11-12

As I reflect on the text and the commentaries I have reviewed, I do not get a much different meaning for those of us standing in the twentieth century. I believe the issue of humankind's role as steward or even co-creator with God is significant and needs to be addressed. God created out of nothing and all that God created was Good. Stuart Briscoe writes, "Clearly this can have profound ramifications of people's concerns about ecology and nuclear matters. Those who believe God created everything good certainly will not be indifferent of developments which may serve only to pollute and ruin, exterminate and defile all that He has made."<sup>11</sup>

For the young adults who believe that they have been left with a devastated environment and society, complete with epidemics, bankruptcy, and the like, the message of God's activity and goodness is a breath of fresh air. Because of their desire for an active approach, the young adult of today is likely to become the conservation activist who will join with God in the preservation of creation. But young adults are not likely to want to leave it there. They are often like Boy Scouts or members of the Sierra Club. When they come by an area, they want to leave it cleaner and better than when they arrived. These young adults, as they come into a relationship with God who seems from the beginning of time to have wanted a relationship with them, may turn out to be some of the most committed people in all of human history. They will not only not pollute, but will take on the stewardship task that God is calling them towards, and they will leave the world a better place for their children and grandchildren. They will do this not because

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<sup>11</sup> Stuart Briscoe, Genesis, vol. 1 of Mastering the Old Testament, ed. Lloyd Ogilvie (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987), 41.

they are powerful, but because they have the ability to catch the vision of empowerment by virtue of God's creation of them.

The account of the flood and the heroic character of Noah is found in Genesis 6:11 - 8:22. Authorship of the flood stories comes from more than one source. One of the sources is Priestly, the other has been the source of debate. Speiser feels strongly that if one is willingly to overlook some very technical details, it is not a problem to accept the Yahwist as the other source. In this case, the source stories are so intertwined that the resulting story in Genesis is "a skillful and intricate patchwork."<sup>12</sup> Since flood stories exist in many, if not most, cultures in ancient history as well as today, the story is not just about the flood, but about the hero, Noah, and his relationship with God.

Von Rad points out that "only immediately before his final entry into the ark did Noah learn of God's plan to destroy mankind by a flood . . . Therefore, Noah completed the entire structure without knowing God's intentions; he had only the command which drove him to blind obedience".<sup>13</sup> He goes on to suggest that the intention of God was to test Noah. The test was to be of his obedience and faith. The Yahwist also uses the opportunity of this obedient hero to describe a righteous man. While English does not have a suitable word for the righteous relationship the Yahwist is detailing, "According to the Old Testament the (righteous person) does justice to a relationship in which he stands.

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<sup>12</sup> Speiser, 54.

<sup>13</sup> von Rad, 116.

If God abides by his covenant, acts according to the covenant, then he is 'righteous' i.e., gracious. If man stands in right relation to God, i.e., believes, trusts God, then he is 'righteous.'"<sup>14</sup>

Westermann is helpful again in providing a structure for the analysis of the flood story. He describes the structure as follows: "1. God's decision to destroy the human race and preserve Noah. 2. Preservation, part 1: the command to build the ark and the announcement of the Flood. 3: Destruction: the coming and result of the Flood. 4: Preservation, part 2: the end of the Flood and departure from the ark. 5: God's decision to preserve the human race."<sup>15</sup> The story, while centered in one man and his extended family, is also a universal story about God's decision to preserve all of humankind as the result of the righteous (obedient) action of the one. The story is tied into creation in that God does not really want to destroy that which God has created. Ultimately, because of God's relationship with humankind through Noah, God decrees that never again will the human race be destroyed.

Stuart Briscoe sermonizes on this text in a helpful construct by talking about the faith life. He suggests that faith is a relationship of trust and that Noah trusted God by going ahead and building an ark, even though it seemed a bit insane. Faith is a readiness to obey as Noah did when he took the next step in bringing the animals of creation into the ark. A release of blessing came from Noah's faith as it carried over to his extended family,

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<sup>14</sup> von Rad, 116.

<sup>15</sup> Westermann, 50-51.

who had done nothing more than the rest of humankind to warrant salvation. In Noah's faith was a resource of power. No one could be expected to live like Noah did and do what he did. No one could really be expected to be that faithful. He was made fool of, but nevertheless kept to his task. Noah's faith also served as a rebuke to unrighteousness as God seemed to respond to his faithfulness and covenant never to destroy the earth again. Finally, Briscoe says, Noah's faith is a constant reminder to those who would follow after him of what a difference faith can make.<sup>16</sup> At the conclusion of the story, God places a bow (rainbow) in the heavens as a sign of his covenant, that God will never again destroy the people's of the earth.

There are a lot of people who read this text and see only the rainbow, the promise of God to preserve creation. And if that's all we read, we have missed the boat. The larger story has to do with obedience and trust in God even when it seemed like a loony thing to do. Here was a man, far from the sea, directed by God to build a large ship, and he does it because God told him to build it. His neighbors thought he was nuts, and probably some of the same family who were saved with him did too. Noah showed dogged determination. There is not even any mention of the neighbor's lending a hand when it started to sprinkle. They just stood by, as so many of us do, and watched themselves drown.

Young Adults have the ability to make tremendous commitments. They are slow to do so because they have been so often disappointed. But at heart, they are like New

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<sup>16</sup> Briscoe, 95-99.

Englanders. My experience with them is that, on the whole, they appear very gruff at first, and even aloof. But when you get to know them, or they you, and the ice between you melts, they become fast friends. So fast, in fact, that it is almost impossible to ever lose their friendship. By interacting with the flood story, and the story of Noah's commitment, obedience and trust in God, we open to the young adult the possibility that people really can make and keep impossible commitments. We also reveal that God is the actor, who chooses Noah, even as God reaches across time calling for them to be in relationship. The story gives hope and promise in God's covenant never to destroy the earth.

In the use of this story, the teacher/leader should be encouraged to research the numerous stories of a universal flood that exist in other religions and cultures. There are stories as diverse as Mesopotamian stories, African Legends, and Native American totem myths about a great flood. In connecting with other cultures and their story, young adults may come to see themselves as part of a greater whole. In connecting with Noah, they can identify themselves in the Hero tradition, and in seeing the bow in the sky, they can know the hope that comes from God's covenant with God's people.

### Stories of God's People

The second two stories in this curriculum set are from the history of God's people and represent themes of commitment, trust, obedience, and covenant. The stories are presented in historical order here. The curriculum uses these stories in a different sequence in order to develop the themes that have been identified for reflection.

Genesis 12:1-5 is mostly Yahwist in origin.<sup>17</sup> The passage forms a significant transition from the primeval history that tells about the origin of the world, and the creation of all people. Now in the call of Abraham, "The story commences with one individual, and extends gradually to his family, then to a people, and later still to a nation . . . Abraham's call, in short, marks the very beginning for the biblical process."<sup>18</sup> According to Speiser, "Yahweh is the subject of the first verb at the beginning of the first statement and thus the subject of the entire subsequent sacred history."<sup>19</sup> The call of Abraham commands him to leave all natural roots. There are three areas he is to leave behind, land, distant family, and close family. The only promise Abraham receives as he responds to the call is land that God promises God will reveal to Abraham at some future date.

One of the significant themes is blessing. God will bless Abraham and his immediate family. As a result of the call of Abraham, all of God's people--those who decide to be in relationship with God--are blessed as well. The amazing thing is that Abraham rose up and went to follow the call of God. He had some substance, he had all sorts of relations, and he had land already. How much did God offer Abraham to have him go? Abraham was promised nothing but blessing. He was promised land as well, but it was sight unseen, and Abraham already had plenty of land and resources to provide well for his family during his old age.

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<sup>17</sup> Speiser, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Speiser, 87.

<sup>19</sup> von Rad, 154

How does one rise up and answer a call like the one Abraham received? I must admit that every call I have answered, except two, involved very little sacrifice. I had to give up almost nothing to answer the call on my life. Except twice. I received an urging while in seminary to do a year-long internship. My seminary didn't have a program. I didn't have a place to go, until, out of the blue, I heard about a need in rural Kansas. My wife thought me crazy, but being a loving individual, she committed with me to go to Kansas for a year to be an intern. We had never seen the land. We had no family anywhere near there. Kansas didn't feel like much of a blessing. But I answered the call, and it was one of the best things that ever happened to me, my ministry, my family, and my faith. On another occasion, I felt a call to return to pastoral ministry in the local church from chaplain ministry in the U. S. Navy. It was a hard decision because I would lose a lot of money, my wife even more. We answered the call. And again, it was one of the best things we have ever done. Scary, risky, and all that, but a blessing nevertheless.

What can this word have to say for the young adult audience? The stories reveal a part that is ours and a part that is God's. God has acted, and has entered into covenant with us. God calls and wants an answer from us. And if the answer means that we will leave behind and follow God, then we need accept the assurance that God will provide for every need and contingency that may arise. The amazing thing for me is that Abraham not only had not ever seen the land he was promised, but he had no idea where it was, or what he would do when and if he got there. But he went, and that one action began the course of our faith history. Young adults are risk takers. It may actually be easier for them to take a risk than for the rest of us. And they are willing to risk, even if they cannot see the



long term reward, as long as they can commit to something they believe is worthwhile. The reward doesn't have to be monetary. For young adult to take the risk, they must believe (have faith) in the journey itself as a trustworthy endeavor. As we work with young adults, let us give our all to provide a sensitive and genuine witness to them, that they may respond and be blessed to be a blessing.

Exodus 16:1-36 describes a portion of the Israelites journey in the wilderness after fleeing from Egypt. The exact location of the wandering of the Israelites in the desert after the exodus from Egypt is not known. However, it is suggested from other sources that the desert was the wilderness of Zin, immediately south of Judah.<sup>20</sup> The exact location of the wandering is not important, except for us to recognize that the people were not wandering around close by familiar territory, but were deep in wilderness and were therefore completely removed from any outside resources. The bulk of this account is by the Priestly writer. The context of the story of manna and quail is between two stories wherein God provides drinking water for the people. Both of these miracles are performed at the hand of Moses who was directed by God first to cause bad water to be good, and second, to bring a spring of water out of a rock in the desert.<sup>21</sup>

Murphy suggests that the situation in the wilderness was a real test of the people's ability to trust Moses, and through him, God. He points out that for the inhabitants of this region, nomadic Bedouin, water and food would have been attainable by attending to the

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<sup>20</sup> "Exodus," in The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 1, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville, Abingdon, 1952), 949.

<sup>21</sup> John H. Dobson, A Guide to Exodus (London: S.P.C.K., 1977), 89.

oasis and springs that were known to be scattered about the desert, and to take advantage of knowing the area well enough to find needed food. But, he indicates, when you pull together a huge multitude of people, you cannot survive long in the wilderness without logistics. There is no doubt that the people were quickly out of food and water. They did not have a supply line set up, or a commissary to provide for their meals in route. It is no surprise that they began to point their finger at Moses. After all, he had led them into this wilderness.<sup>22</sup>

There is no suggestion in any of the commentaries that God caused the people to go into the wilderness in order to test them. Nevertheless, in the wilderness they were hungry and thirsty. Moses prayed to the Lord and water was delivered to them. An oasis of bad water was made sweet by the directions God gave Moses to throw a tree (or branch) into the water. The people began to murmur, and in the murmurings, Moses took the blame for getting them into this situation. Dobson points out that just a short while back "they had been singing songs of victory and praising God for setting them free from Egypt."<sup>23</sup> Now they turned on Moses. Apparently one of the reasons God makes the water sweet by the prophet's hand is an attempt to give Moses some authority with the people. But they still murmur, and God provides. God causes manna, a flaky substance that looked like a frost on the ground, to appear each morning. The people were instructed to take only as much as they needed for the day, and not to hoard it, as it would

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<sup>22</sup> James G. Murphy, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus (New York: I. K. Funk, 1881).

<sup>23</sup> Dobson, 90.

spoil. "The story about quails and manna teaches us that the world which God has made can produce the food that His people need. But if we wish to enjoy the blessings which God has prepared for us, we must be ready to do what He tells us to do."<sup>24</sup>

My conclusion is that God led the people away from Egypt, which made them exceedingly happy, for a time. God did not necessarily lead them into the wilderness, but away from Egypt. In the process, God through Moses demonstrates that God will provide. God's provisioning comes in the form of supplying what the people need. After God gives the manna, God tells Moses to inform the people to live one day at a time, trusting in him. Of course, some try to hoard the "bread from heaven" and it spoils.

The lesson for us today is that God has provided and will continue to provide for us. We may not be ready for a wilderness experience anymore than the Israelites were, but that is where we may find ourselves. And if we do, God will provide if we trust in God. Maxie Dunnam provides a devotional on this text focusing on three words: Token, Test, and Truth. He says that when the people murmured against God, he heard their murmuring, and let them know he had heard and would respond. He gave them that Token of his caring, he heard them. When God provided the manna in the wilderness he also provided a Test. The test wasn't whether they could survive this ordeal, God already knew they could. The test was whether they could live day by day, trusting in God for their daily bread. And finally God gave them a Truth. God demonstrates for them that

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<sup>24</sup> Dobson, 90.

daily bread cannot be stored up, it must be taken and used fresh every day.<sup>25</sup> God is demonstrating that God will come to his people fresh every day, if they will lean on him. We cannot live on just bread and water, but we need the spiritual relationship with our God. Will God's people accept the Token, Trust, day by day, and know the Truth, that the provisions will be given?

Young adults want to trust. They want to make commitments and they want to make a difference in the world. Like other generations, they can be skeptical, but given a chance to commit to one another and to God, they will likely be challenged to lean on God day by day for their subsistence. As we present this story to young adults, we need be certain that it is not seen as another test of them. In some ways, we may be testing God: "Here I am God, in the desert, what are you going to do about it?" But if we can lead young adults to a place where they will willingly trust, their loyalty and commitment will be phenomenal.

### Parables of Jesus

Young adults are action oriented. They will often ask, "How can I get involved?" when confronted with a need in the community. They are risk takers, and are willing to get involved at the most basic level if the cause is right. Young adults will not line up at the local church to serve on the mission committee, but if they hear about a project handing out sandwiches to the homeless, they will lend themselves wholeheartedly to the

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<sup>25</sup> Maxie Dunnam, Exodus, vol 2 of Mastering the Old Testament, ed. Lloyd Ogilvie (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1982). 193 - 200.

endeavor. They are even more willing to get involved if they don't have to think too much about why they are serving. It is not that they are dull or disinterested, but the critical nature of their thinking is not yet fully developed. They are more apt to jump in full swing to a service program and question the motives and beliefs of the program later. If we are genuine and sincere, one of the doorways into the Church for young adults is through participation in Christian service even before they give assent to the Christian faith. Stories that raise sharp questions about the values of the Christian life, including service to others and love and reconciliation will serve to draw the unchurched young adult into the mainstream of the Church.

The two parables chosen to reflect unconditional Christian service and unfailing love and reconciliation are the parable of the Good Samaritan and the parable of the Prodigal Son. Luke 10:29-37, the parable of the Good Samaritan is not paralleled in the synoptic gospels. The context for the story Jesus tells is a question posed by a lawyer (Luke 10:25-29) in which a lawyer wants to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. In the parallel accounts in Mark and Matthew, the question is asked in the last week of Jesus' life, not while he is in ministry in Judea or Samaria as we have it in Luke. In Matthew the question is asked by a lawyer, and in Mark by one of the scribes. "Only Luke includes the parable of the Good Samaritan as part of Jesus' response."<sup>26</sup> In both Matthew and Mark, with their passion setting, Jesus was putting "forth nearly all of his parables of judgment as distinct from his parables of grace."<sup>27</sup> Jesus knew he was heading

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Farrar Capon, The Parables of Grace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 58.

parables of judgment as distinct from his parables of grace."<sup>27</sup> Jesus knew he was heading for Jerusalem and an unjust death, and found himself engaged with the religious authorities in a sparring match in which they were trying to find a reason to arrest and convict him. In the other two accounts of questions, Jesus side steps them effectively by using scripture as the response.

In Luke, Jesus does not answer the question directly. Crossan suggests that parables are parables because they seek to turn the question or the world upside down.<sup>28</sup> A question is asked, often with an expected answer. When the expected answer is given, there is no conflict. But then, along comes Jesus and his parable. A question is asked, to which an answer is expected, even if the answer brought with it condemnation, and Jesus gives a completely unexpected reply, thereby setting the story out of balance. In this case, Jesus doesn't even answer the question at all. In fact, he tells a story, which to some would seem unrelated, and then he asks a twisted question. That is the way of parable, it keeps the tension alive in the story event.

Capon suggests that the main player in this parable is not the Good Samaritan at all, but the man who fell among thieves. He says this parable is misnamed, because the one on the ground, practically dead, is in fact the closest thing to Jesus in the parable. Normally this parable is used to offer a good example for imitation. And even though Jesus ends the parable on the note of imitation, "Go and do likewise," Capon thinks this is

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<sup>27</sup> Capon, 58.

<sup>28</sup> Crossan, 47-69.

too fast a treatment of the story. "True enough, we are called to imitation. But imitation of what, exactly? Is it not the *imitatio Christi*, the following of Jesus? And is not that following of him far more than just a matter of doing kind acts? Is it not the following of him into the only mystery that can save the world, namely his passion, death, and resurrection? Is it not, *tout court*, the taking up of his cross?"<sup>29</sup>

Jeremias takes a different view of the parable. He seems to accept that this is a story about ethical living, and specifically about boundless love. The question he raises is what is meant in the story by the term, "friend." He points out: "It was generally agreed that the term connoted fellow-countrymen, including full proselytes, but there was disagreement about the exceptions." "Hence Jesus was not being asked for a definition of the term, 'friend', but for an indication as to where, within the community, the limits of the duty of loving were to be drawn. How far does my responsibility extend?"<sup>30</sup> While the scribe's question (v. 29) concerned the object of the love (Whom must I treat as a friend?), Jesus (in v. 36), asks about the subject of the love (Who acted as a friend?).<sup>31</sup> Jeremias also speaks to the question of whether Jesus was intentionally targeting the Priest and the Levite as objects of ridicule, or whether he assumed that the audience would know that touching the dead man was against the Levitical code (and therefore acceptable ethical behavior) for either of them.<sup>32</sup> Now maybe the fact that they did not know if he

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<sup>29</sup> Capon, 61.

<sup>30</sup> Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 203.

<sup>31</sup> Jeremias, 205.

<sup>32</sup> Jeremias, 205.

was dead or not, but assumed from his condition, is a problem. It is helpful for me to recognize the different issues that serve to refocus my dialogue with this parable.

Oesterly concludes that the parable is "one of those in which difference between Christ's teaching and the normal teaching of Judaism, as this existed in His day, is set forth. The Jewish Law on the matter of loving one's neighbor is . . . quite clear that by 'neighbor' is meant 'one of the children of thy people.'"<sup>33</sup> The concept of neighbor extends not just down the road to people who are like us, but not just like us, it also extends to those who are not like us at all. It is a hard teaching to accept that we must treat with love those we have learned to hate.

Bruce Larson shares a helpful, hopeful word in his devotional commentary on this passage. "Once we have found this great central truth in life, that we are loved by God now and forever, we can behave like the Good Samaritan and say, 'Whatever is mine is God's and whatever is God's belong to my neighbor because my neighbor belongs to Him. The Good Samaritan is not trying to keep the rules. He isn't even doing his duty. He is doing what is instinctive and natural because of who he is . . . As we give our time, our love, our money, the well is always filled. When we begin to believe, 'What's mine is mine' somehow our lives dry up and we've lost the key to everything."<sup>34</sup>

Young adults of the thirteenth generation have grown up in a world that seems to have abandoned them. They have not always felt love, though they have heard a lot of

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<sup>33</sup> W. O. E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of their Jewish Background (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 164 - 65.

<sup>34</sup> Bruce Larson, Luke, vol. 3 of Mastering the New Testament, ed. Lloyd Ogilvie (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1983), 184 - 85.



talk about what it means to love. With the advent of more and more people begging on street corners, the teaching moment is at hand, almost at any time. Is that one my neighbor? Do I have responsibility to him or her? How can I possibly be neighbor to everyone who has a need? The young adult is engaged in these kinds of questions. They may not be clearly formed, but they are intuitively there. As we study the Good Samaritan with them, we need to move beyond the realm of good works and kindness toward our neighbor, even though that is a starting point, to what it means to truly love as Christ loved. Young adults will take the risk. Will we?

The last story in our set is the parable of the Prodigal Son from Luke 15:11-32. This parable is not paralleled in Matthew or Mark but stands alone in Luke. The immediate context is a series of three "lost things" stories: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son. The beginning of the section at 15:2 has the Pharisees and scribes grumbling, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." Jeremias renames the parable, the parable of the Father's Love, indicating this is a more accurate depiction of what happens in the story.<sup>35</sup>

Prodigal is defined as "recklessly wasteful, extravagant, profuse in giving, exceedingly abundant, lavish, as in a person given to luxury or extravagance."<sup>36</sup> By definition, all three major players in the drama could have been prodigal in their living. At least we can make the case that the son that went away was prodigal in his living, and that

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<sup>35</sup> Jeremias, 128.

<sup>36</sup> "Prodigal," The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.

the father was prodigal in his love. The story line is simple enough. A father has two sons and the younger son comes to the father and asks for his inheritance. For a younger son to ask for an inheritance before the father's death was not uncommon. The father was not obligated to oblige, but the law called for the father's estate to be split with one third going to the younger son, and two thirds to the older. The father agrees to a settlement and gives the younger son all that he will ever be entitled to from his father's estate, even if the estate were to prosper after the settlement.<sup>37</sup> The father did one more thing, and gave the balance of the estate to the older brother (v. 12). After a short time the son goes away to make his living.

In truth we do not know what happened while the son was away. There is nothing in the text to indicate any further communication with the father and older brother. The younger son goes and lives the life of the prodigal, extravagantly spending all his inheritance. After awhile he falls on hard times, and becomes a hired hand slopping pigs, which is a very disgusting way for a young Jewish boy to earn a living.<sup>38</sup> After a time the young son comes to his senses and determines that he could do as well at home working for his father, so he sets his course to come home, apologize to the father, and seek employment there as a hired hand. The father had no further obligation to the son, not even to hire him on the farm.

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<sup>37</sup> Jeremias, 129.

<sup>38</sup> Oesterley, 185-86.

The scene of reconciliation is profound. The father seems to have been waiting for the son to return. Maybe it was just that as a retired senior citizen, he had nothing better to do then sit on the porch and look down his road. When he saw his son a long way off, he ran to him, which was a "most unusual and undignified procedure for an aged oriental even though he is in such haste."<sup>39</sup> The father does all the things he is under no obligation to do, including clothing the son and throwing a party to honor his safe return. When the older son comes home, he is upset and angry that Father would do such a thing for this wayward brother of his. Now the story shifts from concern for the younger brother who was lost and found, to concern for an older brother who has everything, and apparently has never taken any risks in his life. The word of grace turns to judgment as the father pleads with the older brother to set aside his anger and enter into the party. Robert Capon creates a wonderful modernized version of the Father's words that are helpful for us to hear:

The only thing that matters is that fun or no fun, your brother finally died to all that and now he's alive again - whereas you, unfortunately, were hardly alive even the first time around. Look. We're all dead here and we're having a terrific time. We're all lost here and we feel right at home. You, on the other hand, are alive and miserable - and worse yet, you're standing out here in the yard as if you were some kind of beggar. Why can't you see? You own this place, Morris. And the only reason you're not enjoying it is because you refuse to be dead to your dumb rules about how it should be enjoyed. So do yourself and everybody else a favor: drop dead. Shut up, forget about your stupid life, go inside, and pour yourself a drink.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Jeremias, 130.

<sup>40</sup> Capon, 144.

I am a surviving father and can identify with the father in this parable. In December 1991, my 14 year old son was killed tragically at our home. As a father I have been through all the bargains, and would have done anything, even to giving up my life to have had my son not die. But I also understand that tragedies happen. And I thank God for a community of support that surrounds me and carries me when I do not have any energy left to carry myself. I am also a father who has lost a son and had the son come back again. My second son, almost exactly one year after his brother's death, plunged into severe depression. He was suicidal and made a gesture to take his life. After months of counseling I began to see my son come back to life. I remember the day in the therapists office when I knew he was home. He was bored with the conversation, whereas he had been intense for six months. He was concerned about the therapist's time, whereas he had been focused on himself for so many months. There was a sparkle in his eye and he could joke again. My son who was dead had come home again. As a father, I can do nothing less than give everything I have to rejoice and make glad. For that which was dead is now alive.

Young adults perceive that they were unwanted in their generation. In fact, they were the most aborted generation in history. This parable of abundant love that will take you in, even when there is no requirement is a concept that young adults will embrace with passion. They have often been reconcilers in their family homes, and with broken and hurting friends. Chances are greater than 50 percent that the young adults who participate in this study will come from broken homes. When there is so much brokenness around us, it is delightful to hear a message of love, reunion, and acceptance. It is comforting to

know that I do not have to make myself over to be accepted by God. And if God can love me, then maybe I can share that same love with another broken person. Young adults will be quick to pick up on the ramifications of boundless love unleashed in the world. They are not dreamers, but they are bright and alert, and willing to risk it all for the acceptance we can share from this parable. After all, they have nothing to lose. Their parents have it all.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Curriculum:

#### My Story -- An Adventure in Hearing and Telling

This curriculum evolves out of a need for curriculum resources that are specifically targeted for young adults. When the field of curriculum available for Young Adults is surveyed, very few resources are found. Those which do exist presuppose a setting within a church program and Young Adults who are continuing, vice beginning, religious education. While it is true resources which can be used with young adults are bountiful, they are generally targeted for older, more established adults and do not, for the most part, address the unique concerns of young adults.

*MY STORY* is a program designed to help young adults experience their own special religious perspective. The goal of the resource is to help the young adults identify their own stories and to view and evaluate them in light of faith stories in the Judeo-Christian the church as the target community.

#### About the Program

*MY STORY* will be different from what most young adults active in the church will have experienced before, and may be different from the type of teaching with which you are familiar. The foundation of this study is a concern for the individual experience of each young adult who participates. The objectives for this study include community building, identification with faith traditions, and the practice of sharing stories. You may feel uncomfortable not knowing what, if anything is being learned by the participants along

the way. You may even find some young adults who claim they receive nothing from the program. Yet it is the primary aim of this study to help each participant explore stories by telling, hearing, writing, and interacting with their own stories, the stories of other participants, and stories of the Judeo-Christian heritage.

While the study will use stories from the Bible, it cannot accurately be called a Bible Study. Many of us, both leaders and participants, have our own sets of preconceptions about how the Bible should be approached and used in religious education. The program builds bridges between personal stories and the stories of the Jewish-Christian faith tradition. While it does not indoctrinate, it does lead persons to form conclusions about Bible stories and faith traditions. You might find this open-endedness uncomfortable at times. If you keep in mind the overall objectives of the program, you will discover the tension can be very creative.

This program is based on the concept that stories exist everywhere in the world in which we live. Stories are a part of our very being. We use them to describe our world, our origins, and our relationship with other people. Stories define the parameters for behavior in our culture and they are used to communicate mores and traditions. We use stories to point up the foibles in our world and to poke fun at ourselves. Stories are used to deal with pain and suffering which is very much a part of our everyday lives. Stories are used to form answers to the larger questions as well; the meaning of life, the nature of history, our relationship with God.

Storytelling demands both a hearer and a teller. Listening to the stories in the world around us is as important as telling our own story. For in listening to the stories in

the world around us, both those now forming, and those from tradition, we begin to refine our own story as well as experience ourselves as part of the larger whole. This study will introduce participants to the practice of storytelling and story listening. For the very act of becoming aware of the storytelling tradition brings us to an awareness of other people, other ways of thinking and acting, and brings us into the realm of community.

It is also important for us to view familiar stories in new light, and to perceive that the same meanings can be communicated in many different ways. We will also recognize that the same story can mean different things to different people at the same time. This study requires you to look at old stories from new perspectives. Particularly you will be called upon to dialogue with the stories from scripture. As you reflect on stories from Christian tradition you will be asked to reflect on the meaning of this story for your life. You will be asked to think about why we tell a particular story. And you will be asked to explore why certain stories are precious to you while others carry very little personal meaning. This is a bridge building process designed to bring the young adult to an understanding of and appreciation for stories in the tradition.

You are being asked in this program to assume a teaching style which may not be familiar or comfortable to you. You are asked to join with the other participants in a journey. You will be a fellow traveler. If you are used to an authoritative or directive style of leadership in teaching, you will need to learn to set aside that part of the authority which has all the answers. It is most important as you go along for each person to feel his or her answers or interpretations are significant. You may not agree with each other on your individual conclusions. That is acceptable, in fact, almost to be expected if each



participant is honest in the study. It is far more important for meaningful faith growth for each person to know her or his sacred worth. As leader you will guide the study, and need to take responsibility in keeping the study on track. Yet, as it comes to drawing personal opinions, reflections, or conclusions, you will need to foster the spirit of openness and acceptance. Even more, when large questions loom up before the group, you need to help young adults face the questions and recognize their need for further study and exploration, rather than look to you (or another source of authority) for an answer. Again, if you will enter into this program as a fellow traveler, one who still has room to grow and learn, you will be providing a positive model of ongoing Christian education.

As leader, you are asked to become thoroughly familiar with the stories of the study sessions. The exegesis and exposition presented in Chapter 4 is a beginning point and may be used as a guide in the study process. It is suggested that you study each passage in 3-5 critical commentaries and 1 or 2 devotional commentaries. You will find ample resources in your church library, your pastor's study, or your public library. In order to be faithfully to the Jewish-Christian tradition, it is important that each story be carefully studied and all of your questions answered before you begin the study.

Early in the program, each participant will be asked to enter into a covenant with one another. We call the process contracting. In your contracting, some of the values discussed above will be openly presented. Respect for one another's opinions, openness to a dissimilar point of view, and respect for the private nature of the stories revealed are some of the most significant issues. As group leader, you must be willing to model these values from the very beginning of the program. Even as you announce the study to your

potential audience, you must be able to present it with excitement, anticipation, and seriousness. As young adults look to you for leadership, they will also look to you to determine if this study is really something different. Present the program openly, and warmly invite participation. Be sure to reach out beyond the audience that would normally respond to a Bible study.

*MY STORY* consists of six 1 1/2 hour sessions and is easily adaptable to several different time frames. It is best used as a study one night per week for six weeks because of the need for reflection and preparation between sessions. It can be used more than once each week to reduce the length of the study. The program could also be introduced on a weekend retreat and then continued for a period of three or four more weeks. You are encouraged to experiment with different approaches to the presentation of this study.

## SESSION ONE

### *Beginnings*

**Session Length:** 1 1/2 hours

**Materials Needed:** Newsprint or Writing Board and Markers/Chalk

- Objectives:**
1. To introduce the study and set the basic agreement for participants.
  2. To introduce participants to the concept of story.
  3. To begin the process of sharing stories.
  4. To begin the process of dialogue with one another.

### *NOTES FOR THE LEADER:*

Use this session to establish the meeting time and place. The area you use should be large enough for people to gather aside into smaller groups to share stories. The area should be free of interruptions. Help participants to feel comfortable as you gather. As this session will establish the way the program goes, it is very important for participants to feel comfortable, welcome, and able to become involved.

At this session you will also know the actual size of your group. Even if persons are asked to sign up in advance, you never know how many will participate until they actually show. **LIMIT YOUR GROUP TO 10 PERSONS MAXIMUM. IF YOU HAVE MORE INTERESTED, CONSIDER SCHEDULING A SECOND GROUP. 8 - 10 IS AN OPTIMUM NUMBER TO WORK WITHIN ONE GROUP. LARGER GROUPS SEVERELY LIMIT INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION.**

As you prepare for this session, read over Genesis 1, and BENJAMIN very carefully. Become familiar enough with the stories that you can read as if you were telling them. Feel free to write your own Beginnings story to share rather than using the BENJAMIN story. By so doing, you will model what you expect others to do in the weeks ahead.

Warm Up (10 - 15 minutes)

Gather the group in a circle, if possible. Do not gather around a table. Have each person introduce themselves and tell why they were attracted to this study. LEADER should begin and model what you want others to say.

Activity One (15 - 20 minutes)

After all introductions are complete, the LEADER outlines the ground rules for the program. Have newsprint on which to write the ground rules as you explain them to the group. (You may want to write them out in advance, cover them, and introduce them one at a time). When all questions are answered and the group is ready, have each person sign the newsprint in agreement to the ground rules.

THE LEADER SAYS:

*IN THIS STUDY WE WILL BE SHARING STORIES ABOUT OURSELVES AND WHAT WE BELIEVE. WE NEED TO ESTABLISH SOME AGREEMENTS RIGHT AT THE BEGINNING SO THAT EACH PERSON WILL FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH PARTICIPATING. AFTER WE HAVE DISCUSSED THESE AGREEMENTS, WE WILL COVENANT TOGETHER TO KEEP THEM. I AM GOING TO ASK YOU TO JOIN WITH ME IN AGREEING TO THE FOLLOWING AS GROUND RULES:*

1. *EVERY STORY THAT IS TOLD HERE IS IMPORTANT TO SOMEONE.*
  2. *EVERY POINT OF VIEW IS IMPORTANT TO BE HEARD.*
  3. *WE MAY LAUGH AT A FUNNY STORY SOMEONE TELLS, BUT WE  
WILL NEVER LAUGH AT THE PERSON.*
  4. *THE PERSONAL STORIES TOLD HERE WILL NOT BE RETOLD  
WITHOUT THE TELLER'S PERMISSION.*
  5. *I WILL PARTICIPATE IN EVERY ACTIVITY AS FULLY AS I CAN..*
  6. *AS MUCH AS IS POSSIBLE, I WILL ATTEND EACH SESSION DURING  
THE STUDY.*
- ANY QUESTIONS?*

Spend as much time as is necessary to discuss, raise, or answer questions. This is another opportunity to help each participant feel at home with the program.

**Activity Two** (20 - 30 minutes)

LEADER reads the poem BENJAMIN, SEPTEMBER 9, 1985<sup>1</sup> found on the page following this session. (I wrote this story after my son's first day at school, as I remember the morning. Feel free to use your own story of beginnings if it will be more comfortable for you.)

Have the group (include yourself) pair off by twos to discuss the following questions. If you have an odd number in your group, one group will have three. If the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Burns Jr., "Benjamin, September 9, 1985," original unpublished poem, 1985.

group is too large for pairs to work freely in your study room, groups of three will work.

If at all possible, avoid groups of four or larger.

Spend 10 minutes discussing the following questions:

Use the newsprint or a writing board to display these questions for the pairs:

What does the story tell about?

Who do you think wrote this story? Why?

What do you feel from the story?

What character in the story can you most identify with?

What does the story mean to you?

Call the group back together. Spend 10 minutes discussing in the entire group insights found in the pairs.

### Activity Three

LEADER reads Genesis 1. As you read the story, encourage participants to LISTEN. If they have brought Bibles with them, ask them not to follow along, but to sit back with Bible closed and LISTEN.

Break into pairs again. Have participants pair up with a new partner.

Use the same questions from activity one:

What does the story tell about?

Who do you think wrote this story? Why?

What do you feel from the story?

What character in the story can you most identify with?

What does the story mean to you?

Give the groups about 10 minutes to discuss the questions.

Gather the group together. Take 5 minutes to share with the entire group observations that the smaller groups have made. Then ask this question of the whole group:

Why do you think the early Hebrews told this story?

**Homework** (10 minutes)

LEADER asks if there are any questions about the activities of this session. Any left over comments that need to be made? Spend some time talking about how it feels to listen to and discuss someone else's story.

At the conclusion of each session an assignment will be given to bring a specific type of story to the next session. List on newsprint the possible sources to include: Newspaper or magazine articles, music, personal stories, books, etc.

Ask each person to be prepared next session to share a story about the greatest excuse ever told or heard.

**Conclusion:** LEADER concludes this session with a brief prayer.

**NOTE:** Save all Newsprint used each week! If possible, display continually in the room you use. If the newsprint cannot be left up, arrange to post the newsprint with ground rules and discussion questions each week.

BENJAMIN, SEPTEMBER 9, 1985

It was predictable!  
 For months, then for weeks,  
 And finally, all morning:  
 "Is it time to go yet?"  
 Early breakfast.  
 Really much too early for "Almost Five."  
 Get the clothes ready.  
 "Is it time yet?"  
 15 minutes in the sandbox.  
 "Can I have some Lunch?"  
 Now a half hour of sandbox.  
 Mr. Rogers.  
 10:45. "Can we have lunch now?  
 You can't be late, you know."  
 11:15. Dad gives in.  
 Tortillas, cheese, crackers, Chicken Noodle Soup.  
 "You've gotta eat good, you know."  
 A shower - more to stall for time then to clean.  
 12:15 - NOW it's time to leave.  
 In the car - non stop narrative.  
 The Parking Lot.  
 "Can't forget my lunch box."  
 Becky wants to walk us in.  
 Three steps - no more.  
 "I don't want to go to Kindergarten"  
 "But, Ben, all your friends are here."  
 "I know, but I'm scared . . ."  
 "Remember Soccer? You like soccer now!"  
 "But I'm *too* scared."  
 Crocodile tears, trying so to be brave.  
 A gentle, fatherly hug.  
 "It's OK to be scared."  
 "My room is K-1 . . . It's over there. I'm so scared."  
 "I know, Ben. I'm scared too."  
 Rebecca, all compassion, all concern  
 Her face, her eyes, not a tear,  
 speak of her love for big brother.  
 "I'll stay awhile, Ben. OK?"  
 "OK"  
 It was predictable.  
 It was Benjamin.



## SESSION TWO

### *Practice, Practice, Practice*

Session Length: 1 1/2 hours

Materials Needed: Newsprint and markers

- Objectives:
1. To become comfortable with telling stories.
  2. To practice listening to other's stories.
  3. To experience stories from Biblical tradition.

### *NOTES FOR THE LEADER:*

This session can be lots of fun for the entire group. Encourage every group member to have fun with the stories. Some participants who are used to a more structured approach may think some of the session is silly. You will need to be aware of the needs of each group member and be alert to pull them into the program.

If any new members have joined the group, they will be introduced in Activity One. This should be the last session where new persons join the group. If you still have inquiries, you may want to consider adding another study group now or repeating the study as soon as you finish this one.

Beginning with this session, record on newsprint the source of each story told and keep this list running throughout the rest of the study.

Opening Prayer (Brief) Offered by LEADER

Warm Up (10 minutes)

Gather the group in a circle. Have each person introduce themselves with their name and the most memorable thing about them. LEADER should begin and model an

example of what you want others to say. It is important to reinforce the Covenant Agreement from last session.

Activity One (30 minutes)

LEADER introduces this session: *DURING THIS SESSION WE WILL BE TELLING LOTS OF STORIES TO EACH OTHER. THE TITLE OF THIS SESSION IS PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE. THIS SHOULD BE A LOT OF FUN. BECAUSE WE WILL BE TELLING STORIES ABOUT EXCUSES. YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF LAUGHING. REMEMBER, IT'S OK TO LAUGH AT ONE ANOTHER'S STORIES, NOT AT EACH OTHER.*

Have each person share the excuse story they have brought with them. LEADER BEGINS and models telling their excuse story. Since others will follow your lead, it is important to tell the story with all of the details of why you needed the excuse, whether it worked, and the reactions of others involved.

Spend 10 minutes after all stories are told and discuss the following questions:

1. How did you feel telling your story?
2. How did you feel listening to others' stories?
3. What role do excuses play in our lives?

Activity Two (30 minutes)

LEADER reads the story of Noah from Genesis 6:11 - 8:22. Become familiar enough with the story so that you can read it as if you were telling it. If you can, tell the story. Spend 10 minutes discussing the following questions in pairs.

What does the story tell about?

Who do you think wrote this story? Why?

What do you feel from the story?

What character in the story can you most identify with?

What does the story mean to you?

Gather the group together. Take 5 minutes to share with the entire group observations that the smaller groups have made. Then ask this question of the whole group:

Did Noah make any excuses to God? Why or Why not?

Were any of your excuses similar to Noah's excuses?

How was your situation the same as or different from Noah's?

#### Homework (10 minutes)

LEADER asks if there are any questions about the activities of this session. Any left over comments that need to be made?

Review the list (on newsprint) of the possible sources for stories to include:

Newspaper or magazine articles, music, personal stories, books, etc.

Ask each person to be prepared next session to share a story about trustworthiness or betrayal.

Conclusion: LEADER asks for any prayer concerns. LEADER asks if anyone would like to concludes this session with a brief prayer. If there is no volunteer, LEADER offers prayer. LEADER asks if anyone would be willing to offer closing prayer next week.

### SESSION THREE

#### *Who Can You Trust?*

**Session Length:** 1 1/2 hours

**Materials Needed:** Bibles, newsprint and markers, crayons, magazines to cut up for murals, scissors and glue.

- Objectives:**
1. To explore the elements of Trust and Betrayal.
  2. To continue the storytelling process.
  3. To continue listening to other's stories.
  4. To experience stories from Biblical tradition.

#### ***NOTES FOR THE LEADER:***

In this session we begin to talk about the values we find in stories. This is an important shift in process. Encourage every group member to participate in the discussions. Some participants may not have liked the silliness of the previous sessions, now others may not like the relative seriousness of this session. You will need to be aware of the needs of each group member and be alert to pull them into the program.

Remember to record on newsprint the source of each story told and keep this list running throughout the rest of the study.

Opening Prayer (Brief) Offered by VOLUNTEER or LEADER

Warm Up (10 minutes)

Gather the group in a circle. Pass a small loaf of bread (any kind of bread will do) around the group. As each person holds the bread they tell one different use for the bread. Start with a volunteer, LEADER should go last.

It is important to reinforce the Covenant Agreement from first session.

Activity One (30 minutes)

LEADER introduces this session: *WHEN I SAY THE WORD TRUST WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU? I CAN IMAGINE IF WE EACH ANSWERED THE QUESTION WE WOULD HAVE NEARLY AS MANY DIFFERENT ANSWERS AS THERE ARE OF US. SOME OF OUR ANSWERS WOULD RELATE A VERY POSITIVE SENSE OF THE WORD. OTHERS WOULD EXPRESS FEELINGS OF MISTRUST. AS YOU BREAK INTO PAIRS TO SHARE THE STORIES YOU HAVE BROUGHT TO THIS SESSION, THINK ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU FELT REALLY GOOD ABOUT TRUSTING, OR BEING TRUSTED. ALSO, THINK ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU FELT BETRAYED OR WHEN YOU BETRAYED SOMEONE IN A TRUST RELATIONSHIP. WHEN YOU GET TOGETHER IN PAIRS, SHARE YOUR STORIES AS YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE IN SHARING THEM..*

Spend 10 minutes discussing the following questions:

1. What does it mean to be able to trust someone?
2. How does it feel to be betrayed?
3. How does it feel to betray someone's trust?
4. Do you need to have trust in your life? Why? Why not?

Activity Two (30 minutes)

Divide the group in half. The LEADER introduces the activity: *I AM GOING TO TELL YOU A STORY NOW ABOUT MOSES AND THE ISRAELITES AND ONE EXPERIENCE IN THE WILDERNESS. WHEN THE STORY IS FINISHED, EACH*

*GROUP IS ASKED TO CREATE A MURAL DEPICTING THE STORY AND IT'S IMPORTANCE TO YOU. WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED, BOTH GROUPS WILL SHARE THEIR WORK. THE BIBLE REFERENCE FOR THE STORY IS Exodus 16:1-36. YOU MAY WANT TO TAKE A BIBLE FOR REFERENCE AS YOU WORK ON YOUR MURAL.*

LEADER reads the story of Moses from Exodus 16:1-36. Become familiar enough with the story so that you can read it as if you were telling it. If you can, tell the story. Spend 15 minutes working on murals.

Gather the whole group together for each half to share it's mural and tell about it's significance to them. Ask the group to refer to these questions as they prepare their presentation.

What does the story tell about?

Who do you think wrote this story? Why?

What do you feel from the story?

What character in the story can you most identify with?

What does the story mean to you?

Gather the group together. Take 5 minutes to share with the entire group observations that the smaller groups have made. Then ask these questions of the whole group:

Was Trust experienced in the story? Why or Why Not?

Was Betrayal experienced in the story? Why or Why not?

**Homework** (10 minutes)

LEADER asks if there are any questions about the activities of this session. Any left over comments that need to be made?

Review the list (on newsprint) of the possible sources for stories to include:

Newspaper or magazine articles, music, personal stories, books, etc.

Ask each person to be prepared next session to share a story about contracts or agreements..

**Conclusion:** LEADER asks for any prayer concerns. VOLUNTEER concludes this session with prayer. If there is no volunteer, LEADER offers prayer. LEADER asks if anyone would be willing to offer opening and closing prayers next week.

## SESSION FOUR

### *What About Covenants?*

Session Length: 1 1/2 hours

Materials Needed: Bibles, newsprint and markers.

- Objectives:
1. To explore the elements of Contract and Covenant.
  2. To continue the storytelling process.
  3. To continue listening to other's stories.
  4. To practice community building.

#### ***NOTES FOR THE LEADER:***

In this session we will examine the concepts of contract and covenant. Be sure to review the material in Chapter 4 so you are familiar with the ideas of contract and covenant. You need to continue to be aware of the needs of each group member and be alert to pull them into the discussion process or to respect their silence.

Remember to record on newsprint the source of each story told and keep this list running throughout the rest of the study.

Opening Prayer (Brief) Offered by VOLUNTEER or LEADER

Warm Up (10 minutes)

Gather the group in a circle. Ask each group member to tell how they are feeling as they begin this session. Are they thumbs up or thumbs down? Why? LEADER begins this activity and models for the group.

It continues to be important to reinforce the Covenant Agreement from the first session.



### Activity One (30 minutes)

LEADER introduces the activity saying: *LAST SESSION WE WERE ASKED TO THINK ABOUT CONTRACTS AND AGREEMENTS, THOSE WE HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN OR THOSE WE KNOW ABOUT. AS YOU HEAR THESE STORIES, THINK ABOUT WHAT MAKES A CONTRACT GOOD OR BAD.*

Each person shares in the whole group their story about contracts. Take a few minutes more to discuss contracts they have been involved in or know about. Spend 10 minutes discussing the following Questions:

1. What are the elements of a contract?
2. What makes a contract good or bad?
3. What does it mean to enter into a contract?
4. How does it feel to sign a contract?

### Activity Two (30 minutes)

The LEADER introduces the activity by saying: *WE HAVE SHARED STORIES ABOUT CONTRACTS. THIS SESSION IS ABOUT CONTRACTS AND COVENANTS. A COVENANT IS NOT JUST THE SAME AS A CONTRACT. A CONTRACT IS GENERALLY A RECIPROCAL AGREEMENT. THIS MEANS THAT PARTIES SIGN AGREEING TO BOTH GIVE AND RECEIVE SOMETHING OF VALUE TO THEM. FOR EXAMPLE, I AGREE TO RENT YOU A HOUSE FOR \$500.00 PER MONTH. YOU AGREE TO PAY ME THE RENT, AND I AGREE TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A LIVABLE HOUSE. OF COURSE, THERE CAN BE MANY MORE DETAILS TO THE CONTRACT, BUT IT IS A LEGAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN US. A COVENANT DOES*

*NOT HAVE TO BE TWO SIDED. COVENANT INVOLVES A COMMITMENT TO DO WHAT WE SAY WE WILL DO, WHETHER OR NOT OTHERS RECIPROCATE. FOR EXAMPLE, TWO PERSONS ENTER INTO THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE. WHILE THEY MAY ALSO HAVE A LEGAL CONTRACT, THE COVENANT THEY MAKE IS TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER FOR LIFE AND ALWAYS TO ATTEND TO THE NEEDS OF EACH OTHER. THAT IS NOT REQUIRED BY A LEGAL CONTRACT. EVEN IN THE EVENT OF A BROKEN CONTRACT, A COVENANT CAN REMAIN. COVENANTS CAN BE ONE SIDED, AS GOD MAKES COVENANT WITHOUT OUR RESPONSE TO US TO CARE FOR US. PARENTS COVENANT WITH A NEWBORN CHILD TO CARE FOR THAT CHILD. THE CHILD CANNOT RECIPROCATE WITH ANYTHING. THE CHILD HAS NO MEANS TO GIVE BACK ANYTHING MORE THAN LOVE, AND EVEN THAT IS NOT REQUIRED WHEN THE PARENTS MAKE THE COVENANT TO LOVE THE CHILD. THEY KNOW THAT THE CHILD IS NOT ABLE TO RETURN LOVE TO THEM AT THIS TIME.*

Divide the group into pairs. In pairs read the covenant story in Genesis 12:1-5. Evaluate the story and determine if this is a contract or covenant. Be prepared to explain your answer to these questions:

1. Who are the parties involved?
2. What is the agreement?
3. What are the benefits, and to whom?
4. How are the agreements you have made similar or different from those

God makes?

Gather the group together. Take 5 minutes to share with the entire group observations that the pairs have made. Then ask this question of the whole group:

Is this agreement still in force? Why or Why Not?

**Homework** (10 minutes)

LEADER asks if there are any questions about the activities of this session. Any left over comments that need to be made?

Review the list (on newsprint) of the possible sources for stories to include:

Newspaper or magazine articles, music, personal stories, books, etc.

Ask each person to be prepared next session to share a story about kindness and good works in the community.

**Conclusion:** LEADER asks for any prayer concerns. VOLUNTEER concludes this session with prayer. If there is no volunteer, LEADER offers prayer. LEADER asks if anyone would be willing to offer opening and closing prayers next week.

## SESSION FIVE

### *Who Was That Stranger?*

Session Length: 1 1/2 hours

Materials Needed: Bibles, newsprint and markers.

- Objectives:
1. To explore the meaning of Good Work.
  2. To identify neighbor.
  3. To continue the storytelling and listening process.
  4. To practice community building.

#### *NOTES FOR THE LEADER:*

In this session we will begin to reflect on Christian parables. Review carefully the discussion of parable in Chapter 4 in preparation for this session. This is an important concept for young adults as they often want to know "how" rather than "why." The whole session will focus on acts of charity or mercy. The stories that participants bring are to be directed toward good works and kindness. Review the section in Chapter 4 carefully regarding the concepts involved. This is the next to the last session. You need already to be making plans for closure with this group. A concern you need to have is for continued faith communities for members of the group who want to go on learning more about and sharing their stories.

Opening Prayer (Brief) Offered by VOLUNTEER or LEADER

### Warm Up (10 minutes)

Gather the group in a circle. Ask each group member to tell about someone from their childhood who was very important to them. LEADER begins this activity and models for the group.

It is important to reinforce the Covenant Agreement from first session.

### Activity One (30 minutes)

LEADER introduces the activity saying: *LAST SESSION WE WERE ASKED TO BRING STORIES ABOUT ACTS OF KINDNESS AND GOOD WORKS. AS YOU HEAR THESE STORIES, IDENTIFY THE ACTS OF KINDNESS AND GOOD WORKS IN THE STORIES.*

Divide the group into pairs. Have each participant share kindness and good works stories. Gather the group together to report from the pairs on what elements of kindness and good works they discovered. List these elements on newsprint. Spend 10 minutes discussing the following Questions:

1. What makes an act Good?
2. What makes an act Kind?

### Activity Two (30 minutes)

LEADER introduces this activity by asking for volunteers to dramatize the parts of the story as it is read. Needed are a traveler, a Lawyer, a Priest, some robbers, a Samaritan, and an innkeeper. LEADER reads the story of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:29-37. Become familiar enough with the story so that you can read it as if you were

telling it. If you can, tell the story while the story VOLUNTEERS act out the story.

Spend 15 minutes discussing the following questions in pairs.

What does the story tell about?

Who do you think wrote this story? Why?

What do you feel from the story?

What character in the story can you most identify with?

What does the story mean to you?

Gather the group together. Take 5 minutes to share with the entire group observations that the pairs have made. Then ask these questions of the whole group:

1. Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? (Luke 10:36)
2. Who is your neighbor?
3. How is the neighbor in this story similar to neighbors you have known?  
How is the neighbor different?

### Homework (10 minutes)

LEADER asks if there are any questions about the activities of this session. Any left over comments that need to be made?

Review the list (on newsprint) of the possible sources for stories to include:  
Newspaper or magazine articles, music, personal stories, books, etc.

Ask each person to be prepared next session to share a story about separation and reunion. Next session will be out last. Begin to think about what concluding this study means for you.

Conclusion: LEADER asks for any prayer concerns. VOLUNTEER concludes this session with prayer. If there is no volunteer, LEADER offers prayer. LEADER asks if anyone would be willing to offer opening prayer next week.

## SESSION SIX

### *Coming Home*

**Session Length:** 1 1/2 - 2 hours

**Materials Needed:** Bibles, stationery, pens, and envelopes.

- Objectives:**
1. To explore the meaning of separation and reconciliation.
  2. To identify the meaning of friendship.
  3. To continue the storytelling and listening process.
  4. To establish forms of ongoing community.

#### ***NOTES FOR THE LEADER:***

As this is the last session, tying up any loose ends is a primary focus. This session will concentrate on helping each group member identify (recognize) those persons he/she can turn to in order to continue the story sharing process. Young adults will often be separated from home, friends, and familiar surroundings. By helping these young adults identify sources of friendship, they can continue the process of community building that they have been introduced to in this study. You may need to announce in advance that this session may go longer as we conclude our time together.

**Opening Prayer** (Brief) Offered by VOLUNTEER or LEADER

**Warm Up** (10 minutes)

Gather the group in a circle. Ask each participant to share how they are feeling as we begin this last session together. LEADER begins this activity and models for the group.

**Activity One** (30 minutes)



LEADER introduces the activity saying: *LAST SESSION WE WERE ASKED TO BRING STORIES ABOUT SEPARATION AND REUNION. AS YOU HEAR THESE STORIES, TRY TO IDENTIFY WITH THE FEELINGS OF SEPARATION AND REUNION.*

Divide the group into groups of three. Have each participant share their story. Gather the group together to report from the small groups on what feelings about separation and reunion we could surface from the stories.

#### Activity Two (30 minutes)

LEADER introduces this activity by announcing that there are three primary characters in this story about separation and reunion. Have each person try to identify with one of the characters as the group listens to the story. LEADER reads the story of the Prodigal Son from Luke 15:11-32. Become familiar enough with the story so that you can read it as if you were telling it. If you can, tell the story. Spend 20 minutes discussing the following questions in the whole group.

What does the story tell about?

Who do you identify with most in the story? Why.

Take the role you least identify with and talk about how it feels?

What does it take for reunion to occur after a time of separation?

#### Activity Three (20 minutes)

This last activity is a personal activity. Each group member will need paper, pencil and a place to think and write quietly.

Ask each member to sit quietly in silence for 5 minutes. Ask them to do nothing but think about people who are good friends, anywhere in the world.

Ask the members to write down a first name or initials of each friend whom they recalled. Next to each name put down the quality you like most about them. This will not be shared with the group. Allow 5 minutes.

The Leader says: *NOW SELECT ONE OF THESE NAMES. WRITE A LETTER TO THIS PERSON TELLING A STORY ABOUT YOUR LIFE DURING THE LAST YEAR OR SO. THE ONLY WAY ANYONE WILL EVER SEE THIS LETTER IS IF YOU SHARE IT WITH THEM.*

**Conclusion** (10-20 minutes)

Gather the group back together. Allow time for any final sharing that needs to take place.

Ask participants to take a piece of paper and evaluate the study as follows:

1. What are some of the insights you gained from this study?
2. What were some of the surprise learnings you experienced?
3. How are you different because of this study?
4. If you were to do another study of this sort, what would be important to you?
5. What commitments, if any, do you take with you from this study?

No names are necessary on evaluations

**Conclusion:** LEADER asks for long term prayer concerns. LEADER concludes this session with prayer.

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusions

#### Overview

The use of storytelling in young adult Christian Education curriculum works.

The curriculum resource presented here has been tested in sections in a number of settings within the local church where I pastor. In addition, a previous version was tested while I was still a Navy Chaplain in a chapel setting with mostly young couples. Admittedly, the biggest problem in using a curriculum with unchurched young adults is finding the forum for them to intersect with the Church. See further comments about an approach to the unchurched young adult community.

The method of story exchange is fascinating for the participant, and sessions have gone longer than planned because of the enthusiasm of the new story tellers. The approach of allowing young adults to *find* themselves in story is well received, and it seems to validate the contention that we will not be able to force feed today's young adult. Because of their ability to *discover* some new things in the story listening and telling process, the participants often assume that the leader did not have a clue that they could discover such a thing. It is fun to see individuals dialogue with scriptural material in a way that draws them into the faith community, especially since some have not been connected with the community at all in the past.

### Successes

The overall design is effective. The curriculum unit included with this project has been revised in light of feedback from the field experiences. It has been revised particularly in regard to time and order of events to take best advantage of the energy levels of participants as they begin the study. After the young adults are involved in the study for a few weeks they may desire longer sessions or an extension of the study. Especially as we move toward closure and next steps, this desire for more involvement can lead to further explorations into storytelling in the biblical tradition. The overwhelming response we have had is that there is not enough time, and that the participants want to go farther. My energies will be directed in the months ahead to designing some additional story sets using the same teaching methods to provide opportunities for further exploration. My plan is to make these units more specifically directed to questions of faith, such as Who am I and Who is God, ethical dilemmas in faith, and how can I live the Christian life. My study will also lead towards more use of story sets from other cultures. I early abandoned this idea because I did not want the first unit to be a show and tell of stories, but wanted to bring the participants' stories to the front. In further studies, with persons who have experience with the model, we can explore different forms of folk tale, follow parallel traditions, and see how other story sets interplay with our Christian set.

It is also notable, though not surprising, that the story telling model works well intergenerationally. We have used the storytelling process, a session at a time, with some Sunday evening potluck programs. This is a very undisciplined place to attempt the study,

but it has been rewarding to see how folks respond to the story event. Even some of the older types who prefer a lecture form of Sunday school have been able to enter into story telling. I can't say how they would respond to a longer time commitment. Perhaps by attracting them with a few teaser sessions, the older generation would find great joy in the model.

We have also tried the material with some short term experiences on retreat and with our confirmation class. The youth really enjoy the role playing portions, and we have found ourselves changing the model to play out the stories rather than tell or read them. The only real problem I have observed is that much more direction has to be applied to keep the youth on track while they are working in dyads and triads. I fear that by applying too much direction, the ability to freely explore the story model will be severely impacted. I do not expect to use the material specifically with youth in the near future, but with youth as part of an intergenerational event. They seem to be more task oriented when they are helping older adults to understand the process.

### Failures

The biggest problem in trying to institute the material is attracting unchurched young adults to the program. I suppose that sounds almost naive, but when we have a track record of almost chasing young adults away, it is difficult when we have something to offer to bring them back. Our greatest success has been in working with one young adult or couple at a time. Unfortunately, this curriculum resource, as presently conceived,

does not work as a personal discipleship curriculum like the Navigator material does. This material was designed for a larger group, and is not intended for just two or three participants. We will seek to address how the dynamics of group size and the number and variety of stories will change the way the storytelling process works.

The next step will be to make the material available to some campus ministries. The problem there, of course, is that while college students are young adults, most of them would not fit into the category of unchurched. Either we have the young adults, through larger programs at the universities and large churches who are churchied, or we have very small numbers of unchurched individuals who for some reason have come looking for something in the Church. In my setting, we need to develop ways to reach out more intentionally to the unchurched young adult population in our community.

One of the insights gained from this study is the affinity the thirteenth generation and the Silent generation have for one another. People in the generational group two cycles ahead of the thirteenth generation seem to have a real interest in and understanding for young adults. It may be that the approximate 44 year age difference overcomes any differences these two groups have. I have been fascinated to observe the natural connections that people in local congregations are making cross-generationally. We need to explore how to capitalize on this natural affinity and nurture those relationships in the life of the faith community.

The best possibility we have for reaching the unchurched young adult is through peer leadership. By equipping young adults who are already in the church to recruit and

establish home study groups using the storytelling approach, we can make use of existing friendship - kinship lines that already exist in our society. Further, even though the young adult in the church may have a slightly different world view than the unchurched young adult, they often have a zeal for service and outreach which is contagious. Their genuine and sincere attitude will serve them well as we commission them as missionaries to their own generation.

### The Hope We Have

It seems that we in the Church, are now reaping the harvest of ignoring young adults for the last three decades. Further, the expectation we have had that the Church will prosper will not carry us into the twenty-first century. The great hope we have for the Church is in attracting and traditioning the thirteenth generation. At the same time that I say that, we need to note that we are moving through the last one third of the thirteenth generation. This means we must begin a very careful reflection on the attributes of the millennial generation. They are not cut from the same cloth. If we are to be honest to a traditioning Christian education model, we must constantly retool to meet the needs of emerging audiences. Millennialists will be the group to reach if the church is to be effectively involved in ministry in the next ten years. If the church does not reform to meet the needs of people where they are, the church will not be able to survive. This curriculum, refined and expanded for varying specialty audiences within the thirteenth generation will serve the Church well as an education and outreach tool. At the same time

we need to review other avenues of service to the community that will attract the young adult of today's generation who are willing to risk a lot to belong.



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